

*Old Age Security Act Amendment*

the hands of old age pensioners. I am not saying this to deter the Leader of the Opposition from making a speech.

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** I say at once, with regard to this plan which has now been elucidated in some detail, that it constitutes, in effect, a means test, no matter how carefully and sedulously the minister endeavoured to get away from that salient fact.

Toward the end of his remarks he said—and I hope I am quoting him correctly—“We are concentrating this legislation where the need is greatest.” In other words, in the last paragraph of his speech he revealed clearly and succinctly, though unconsciously, that what is being done here is to impose a plan which has not been accepted for years in this nation, namely, one which will bring into effect the meanest test of all—a means test.

• (3:50 p.m.)

However much he was able to decorate the proposal that he made with beguiling tinsel, verbal tinsel, he cannot get away from the fact that this proposal embarks on a new proposition, namely, that means tests and needs tests, masquerading under whatever name the minister may apply to them, are now going to be accepted as necessary requirements for those who are in need across this country.

The minister said there will be no interference with the incentive to work for those who qualify. If they work and earn, does that in no way reduce their eligibility? If a person has an income of \$500 a year, or \$300 a year, will that income secured by him as a result of his own efforts not reduce his qualification for the pension? Certainly, it would appear to.

Sir, what is being done here will bring about a new bureaucratic apparatus, with snoopers on every hand. It cannot operate otherwise. The resolution states that there will be provision for appeals by pensioners against decisions or determinations made under the act. That is something which was not dealt with by the minister. Since you set up an appeal procedure you indicate that a full and careful examination will be made, that snooping will be in effect and that the individual, on bended knee, will have to establish his need in order to get the added amount.

The minister ended by referring to great power and asking who is afraid of the big bad wolf? He said that constitutionally the government felt this could be done. That was another revelation.

For the past several months we have been asking for action. We were informed that we could not get any action on this intended legislation until medicare was passed. But then the new government of the province of Quebec made an announcement. What is happening here is that the government of Canada is now in a rush to get this legislation through parliament before the legislature of Quebec can take action. That is the reason for the rush; that is the reason for the change. It is as patent as can be.

There was no concern about bringing this legislation forward over the last weeks and months during which old age pensioners have been faced with the highest cost of living in Canada's history; suddenly on Friday, this government that was conscienceless up to that point developed a new acceleration. One can only attribute to the fears of the government over what was announced in Quebec for this action at this time. Some of those close to the government, invariably recipients of information in advance of parliament, have stated that the move is regarded as a quick reply to the position taken by the Quebec government on Thursday. In the throne speech, Quebec claimed exclusive jurisdiction over old age security, and the federal government wanted to get in first.

That may have been the reason for the concluding remarks of the minister when, with lachrymose tones, he appealed to the house to pass this legislation at the earliest possible date, with dispatch and expedition, because otherwise there might be some delay in the payments.

If I understood the minister correctly, there are not going to be any payments until March. That being so, it is obvious that what has happened has been that this government suddenly developed an initiative. It suddenly dragged itself out of the characteristic inertia because of what was said in the speech from the throne in Quebec on Thursday last.

We have taken the stand that the old age pension should be increased immediately from \$75 a month to \$100 a month. We have asked for this over and over again, by motions and otherwise. We took that stand during the election campaign. We took that stand on January 20, 1966, when I moved, seconded by the hon member for Perth “that the following words be added to the address:

We respectfully regret that Your Excellency's advisers have omitted to provide for an immediate increase from \$75 per month to \$100 per month for all recipients under the Old Age Security Act.