

Old Age Pensions

Once that difficulty has been cleared up there can be no serious objections to the proposal I was making. I do not hesitate, Mr. Speaker, to advocate once again that we should set up as our immediate goal the payment of a \$60 a month pension to our senior citizens after they reach the age of 60. I stipulate that that would not cause an increase in taxation if we used a realistic financial system.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, it is not my purpose to comment on the financial proposals put forward by the hon. member who has just taken his seat, but I should like to say a few words in support of his contention—which some of us have made frequently on the floor of this house—that the time has come for an increase in the amount paid to our old age pensioners.

It seems to me that the case is so clear for an increase in that pension that it should not be necessary to argue for it at all. The amount of the pension across Canada at the present time is \$40 a month, a figure that was reached in 1949 just prior to the election before the last one. Since that time the cost of living has gone up. It should also be pointed out that the Canadian standard of living has improved. As technological progress makes possible an improved standard of living I submit that our senior citizens should share in that improvement.

Not only has there been an increase in the cost of living and an improvement in the standard of living in this country but there has been a tremendous increase in our gross national production. In the year 1949, when the old age pension was fixed at \$40 a month, our gross national production was of the order of \$16 billion a year. At the present time that figure is of the order of \$24 billion a year, or perhaps it is even closer to \$25 billion a year. If we have been able to increase our gross national production in this country by 50 per cent since the time the old age pension was set at \$40 a month, I submit that that pension should be increased at least by that same amount, namely 50 per cent. If a pension of \$40 a month is increased by 50 per cent, that brings it at least to the figure of \$60 a month.

Moreover, in the years that have gone by since the pension figure was set, there have been other increases. There have been wage and salary increases in many cases. There have been many increases, voted by parliament, in the salaries of various people, not forgetting the increase that was voted this year in the indemnities paid to senators and to members of parliament and in the salaries of cabinet ministers. In the light of all of

these changes that have been made and in the light of the improvements that are enjoyed by other people, I suggest that it is a disgrace to parliament and a crying shame that the government has done nothing to improve the position of our senior citizens. I feel that this session should not be allowed to go by without the government's introducing the necessary measure to increase the amount of that pension.

Like the hon. member for Lethbridge (Mr. Blackmore), I feel that the eligible age should be lowered with respect to the pension without a means test. There are those who suggest that the pension should start at age 60 and there are others who suggest that it should start at age 65. Perhaps that is a point over which we should not get into an academic argument at this time. However, I certainly believe that the very least that should be done at the present time is to remove from the pension at age 65 the means test which we now have and pay the full amount of at least \$60 a month at that age. It is utterly ridiculous that so many people find themselves in the position of being retired from industry at the age of 65, having just enough by way of their own resources that they cannot qualify for old age assistance but being told that if they can somehow manage to live through the five years from age 65 to 70, they will then get the full old age security pension without a means test. It does not make sense; it does not add up; it is not to the credit of the parliament of Canada. I suggest that that change is long overdue.

There are other changes of a similar character that should be made. I hope that we shall not have to wait many more days before the government will bring in whatever other legislation it has respecting our veterans, and that that other legislation will include an increase in the amount of the war veterans allowance. In my view our senior citizens in these various groups deserve more than the brush-off they have had from the government in these recent years.

The plan that was put through as a result of the sittings of the committee on old age security back in 1950 was, in principle, an excellent one. At that time it was also good in respect of its terms. But just because something was good at one point in time does not mean that it is good enough in those precise terms for all time to come. What annoys me is that the government seems to be satisfied to sit back and let the matter stand as it was settled as a result of the meetings of that committee in 1950. Time has moved on and our senior citizens deserve