

Old Age Security Act Amendment

Mr. Speaker, I believe that it is only fair to have all pensioners treated equitably according to the same method. It is important that the legislation we are considering shall entail no discrimination nor give rise to discontent among the people. The senior citizens are entitled to such treatment, and I call upon the minister—it is not too late, I believe—to reconsider his bill and listen to his colleagues of the Liberal caucus who have made to him representations similar to ours, to the effect that there should be a flat increase, regardless of means or needs. We have heard it said several times that tremendous pressures have been exercised on the minister. Up to now, he has refused to yield, but I believe that logic and common sense demand that he should reconsider his position and grant an equal amount to all the older citizens.

Before resuming my seat, Mr. Speaker, I should like to deal with one more point on which, as a representative of the province of Quebec, I would like some explanation. The hon. minister knows that the Quebec government recently declared its intention of taking over the field of old age pensions. We also know that the Quebec government has the support of the Liberal opposition at the legislative assembly, and that Messrs. Lesage and Laporte have explicitly approved the intentions of the Quebec government in that respect.

Section 94 of the B.N.A. Act also gives the provincial government the right to legislate in that field. I should like to quote that section, which reads as follows:

The parliament of Canada may make laws in relation to old age pensions and supplementary benefits, including payments to survivors and invalids regardless of their age but no law shall affect the operation of any law present or future of the provincial legislature in relation to old age pensions.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the minister owes some explanations to the citizens of Quebec in general, and also to the Quebec representatives in this house. He must indeed make his position clear, because it would seem unfair to leave unsettled a problem which interests so many people and raises so many questions in the minds of the citizens of Quebec as well as of the other provinces. I think the minister should clearly state his position in this regard and trust this house. He should also say how he understands article 94 of the British North America Act.

It is impossible to ignore the wishes of any Canadian province, whether it be Quebec,

Ontario or any other, and I think the minister should state his position clearly. I therefore ask him not to miss the opportunity to make his position known, because if this is not done, there may be between the two levels of government a misunderstanding which would be prejudicial to the population. I think that the minister will want to spare the population that.

Mr. Maurice Allard (Sherbrooke): Mr. Speaker, I would like to express special criticisms on Bill No. C-251 entitled:

An act to amend the Old Age Security Act.

• (4:20 p.m.)

In my opinion, this bill lacks generosity toward our senior citizens and encroaches on provincial prerogatives, without consultation with the provinces and without providing unconditional fiscal compensation to an active province, a province which decides or would decide to occupy the field of old age pensions.

According to the original character of old age pensions—that is when they were established in our country—the government should now increase them to \$100 per month, even if provinces are allowed to keep the indigent cases which would persist despite this automatic increase to \$100. By refusing to do this, the present Liberal government practises toward elderly persons a beggarly policy. This reminds me when we were attending primary school, we used to see that picture in our readers; a family had confined the old parents to a corner of the kitchen, serving them a very poor allowance of food for their meals, forgetting all the services and the work they had done.

In my opinion, the government's approach in that bill is a beggarly policy. Neither does the government take into consideration its capacity to pay. It can today, if it so decides, give all recipients of old age pensions an automatic and universal pension of \$100 a month, according to its capacity to pay and the cumulative surpluses of the old age security fund, and taking also into account the savings it could realize in certain fields coming under its jurisdiction. I mean especially the Department of National Defence where we spend too much according to the part we play in international organizations and according to our little importance in international and defence matters.

At this point, I should like to quote in part a speech delivered by the hon. member for Cartier on November 28, 1951, referring to the Old Age Security Act that had just