

Old Age Security Pensions

this at a time when at long last we have increased the pensions of our retired civil servants, of the RCMP, and, of course, of ourselves.

The motion in my name calls for the following action to be taken. It reads:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should give consideration to improving the economic and social status of Canada's senior citizens by (a) increasing the income tax exemption to \$2,000 for single persons and \$4,000 for couples, (b) lowering the old age security pension age for women to 60 years, (c) exempting old age security pension payments from taxable income, (d) supplying the full cost of living increase bonus to old age security pensioners and making this bonus effective immediately each time the cost of living index advances by 2 per cent, (e) restoring the \$500 a year income tax exemption for old age security pensioners at 65 years, (f) giving the right to all pensioners receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement to earn up to \$300 a year, (g) continuing the pension for a period of six months, following the decease of an old age security pensioner, payable to the survivor, (h) increasing the old age security pension to \$150 a month.

This motion follows very closely the brief presented last year at this time to Members of Parliament and to Senators by the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens Federation. The resolutions which I have encompassed in my notice of motion are on all fours with what has been proposed by the provincial senior citizens organizations across Canada.

I urge hon. members not to defeat this motion. The passage of any of its parts could bring the comfort and help to many thousands of homes across the nation which is so badly needed. Members of all parties have at one time or other voiced the opinion that the time is overdue for this House and the government to do something on behalf of old age pensioners, but if there has been one person in the House who, over the years, has spearheaded such an appeal, it has been the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), my colleague. Let me refer to just one of the numerous speeches and references he has made on the necessity of doing something now about old age pensioners. I will paraphrase briefly what he said in the House last May 4.

It should be remembered that the situation of which he spoke then has since deteriorated further as regards so many of our older people. At that time, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre pointed out that there were approximately one and a half million old age pensioners in Canada, and of that number over half, about 785,000, were so poor as to be on the guaranteed income supplement. Of that figure again over half, that is

[Mr. Mather.]

473,000, drew the full amount of the guaranteed income supplement. To get the full guaranteed income supplement, one has to have literally nothing.

The hon. member also quoted some other figures. While the consumer price index had gone up at that time rather more than 16 per cent, increases in old age pensioners' incomes, in line with the 2 per cent a year increase linked with the cost of living increase, had gone up approximately 6.1 per cent. So, the old age pensioners have not received a 6 per cent guideline increase in income but have taken what amounts to a 10 per cent cut in their income, and this at a time when so many prices, wages, profits and other incomes have gone up a great deal beyond the 6 per cent that the government recognizes.

It is surely a twist of the economic screw that the very increases in income, profits and prices which the more affluent of us have secured over the last period have added to the cost and the burdens of those people who are least able to support them, that is the old age pensioners. They have lost about \$10 out of every \$100 they have taken in, and we continue to let them do that.

This motion, if passed or referred for action to a committee, would help to correct that situation. I ask hon. members not to oppose it, and if possible to support it to the extent of sending it for action to a committee.

I hope that spokesmen for the government will not remind me of the study of social security which the government is still conducting. The old age pensioners of Canada are being studied to death.

Mr. P. M. Mahoney (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, this is a very generous and noble resolution. I am moderately amazed that we do not also have a provision to offer free tobacco to old age pensioners in addition to the many other marvellous things we would like to do for them. Certainly, no one could argue with the sentiments or the desirability of providing the various levels of benefits which the hon. member has proposed. One might find it difficult to see how we can achieve this if we adopt some of the rather introverted economic policies that members of his party have advocated for our country in recent days. Nevertheless, the fact is that the government is anxious, and could not be more anxious, to ensure that Canada's senior citizens are able to live in comfort and in dignity. The government is and will continue for many years to