

Old Age Security Act Amendment

tax returns if Bill C-251 is passed in its present form. There is another interesting comment in this booklet at page 35:

Because of the nature of its work, the taxation division is the largest employer of professional accountants in Canada with some 850 on staff at the time of this report.

A great many more will have to be employed when this division begins checking the income tax returns filed by pensioners as a result of the adoption of this measure. The report also indicates that there are 7,900 on staff for income tax return checking purposes. This number will also be increased if this bill is passed in its present form.

The report also refers to the complexity of checking income tax returns as a result of the adoption of this bill in its present form. Not long ago, and this may or may not be coincidental with this measure, the income tax division of the Department of Revenue attempted to acquire inspectors and checkers. I am not suggesting they are now being employed for purpose of checking returns necessitated by this measure but I imagine they will be put to work in this regard.

At page 10883 of *Hansard* for December 8, the minister is recorded as having said:

No doubt it would have been simpler in the short run to have raised the old age security pension to \$100 a month for all the recipients of old age security—

To be fair to the minister he went on to point out that he felt the pension plan he was introducing would make better use of federal financial resources. He did say, however, that in the short run the universal application of old age pensions would be much simpler. In the same statement he said that this was only a temporary plan or, as he referred to it, a transitional plan until the Canada and Quebec pension plans come into full effect in 1967. Surely that statement fits in with his suggestion that in the short run an old age security pension of \$100 a month across the board would be much more simple.

The minister has heard strong arguments against the application of a means test and some of his colleagues have allied themselves with these arguments. In this regard let me commend the hon. member for Brantford (Mr. Brown) and the hon. member for York East (Mr. Otto). I am sure they have voiced the opinion of other government members who may yet take part in this debate. The hon. member for Kootenay East (Mr. Byrne) may be one of them.

[Mr. Pascoe.]

Members of the opposition have been effective in improving government legislation through debate in this house. This is true in respect of the medicare proposal. The government yielded to argument on the part of the opposition and made necessary amendments. This indicates that the minister does listen to reason and can be persuaded to make changes. A bill sponsored by the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pickersgill) will be placed before the house shortly. As a member of the committee on transport and communications I hope the minister will listen to our arguments, as he did when the bill was being studied by that committee.

It is our hope that we can persuade the government to do away with the "MacEachen income test" in respect of Bill C-251. We are not attempting to obstruct legislation by carrying out the job of the opposition, which is to impress upon the government the need for necessary changes in legislation.

Let me reinforce my argument in respect of the role of the opposition by referring to comments of hon. members now sitting on the government side. I take these quotations from *Hansard*. The hon. member for Parkdale (Mr. Haidasz) when sitting in opposition said, as recorded at page 398 of *Hansard* for October 11, 1962:

Since it is the duty of members of the loyal opposition to oppose I cannot see how one can have effective opposition without constructive criticism.

That is exactly the position we take tonight, Mr. Speaker. That hon. member went on to say:

I believe that no reform can be achieved and no survival is possible without the freedom of honest and vigorous criticism.

Let me quote from the words of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Laing) who made a speech at Swan Lake, Manitoba, on December 5, 1966. He said:

In our democratic system it is always the right of the opposition to oppose, and often its responsibility to oppose. It is opposition and delay and persistent inquiry that produces legislation free of blemish . . . I have said I respect the right of the opposition to oppose.

At this time I am speaking in the interests of our senior citizens who have forwarded petitions asking for an increase in old age security pensions without a means test. I have these petitions here but will not read them. Every petition I have asks for an increased pension without a means test.