

Suggested Pension Payment Corrections

stingy to reduce, by all means, this income supplement.

Other cases have been called to my attention since the month of January 1969. For instance, I have been told of people aged 80 or 85, on the last leg of their lives, who, with great difficulty and because they have the good fortune of living still with relatives, a daughter or a son, have saved a small capital of \$1,000, \$1,500 or \$2,000 that they keep in the bank, very carefully, to cover their burial expenses. Now, under the pretence that they have accumulated a small sum of money in the bank, though almost insignificant, the government decreases or curtails their guaranteed income supplement.

There again, in my opinion, we find only stinginess. The government takes away from them something essential, in fact, barely a vital minimum. Such action shows only stinginess and is, I believe, shameful.

As members of parliament we are of course very often called upon to make decisions. Therefore we should remove from the Pension Act as well as from the Old Age Security Act any ambiguity and stinginess, in short anything liable to sadden, so to speak, the last years of our senior citizens.

On the contrary, the pensioners should then feel happy to have lived in a country which has succeeded in setting off their worth. So, we should not have citizens who at the end of their life are having difficulties with the government of their own country regarding the old age security pension. Then, let us not be mean and let us give them what falls to them by right. As for the ones who have worked all their life, no matter what they have accumulated, the services they have rendered are priceless and we must therefore be extremely grateful to them.

Since an escalator clause is to be found everywhere, it is obvious that it should also be included in the Old Age Security Act. There is a similar anomaly with respect to family allowances, for instance, which have remained fixed, but even this is not a fair word, because, following the increase in the cost-of-living index and the relative value of money today, these allowances are worth substantially less in terms of purchasing power.

Consequently, provision for an increase is quite normal and proper. All legislation of this kind should normally provide for an increase in pensions each year or at regular intervals in accordance with the increase in

[Mr. Matte.]

the cost of living. This is a very logical provision, even an elementary one, and, consequently, we give it our complete support.

Naturally, if the ideal to which members of the Ralliement Cr ditiste aspire could be reached, we would probably not have so many problems to face in the pension field, because money would then be truly at the service of the citizen. But we have to face up to the facts, and since this is part of the system we live in, we shall support this motion under the circumstances.

• (3:50 p.m.)

[English]

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that the motion moved by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) has given the house an opportunity to discuss the important issue of income support for our senior citizens and others. If I were to hazard any criticism of the definition set out by the hon. member in his motion it would be that, if anything, its focus is too narrow.

The government is giving serious and continuing consideration to the importance of income support measures, not only to those on social allowances and pensions but to all those receiving any form of income support at all. It is also considering whether the present structure of programs reaches all those in need of such support or if entirely new structures should be developed. I hope that the statements today from various parts of the house will be directed to this broad question rather than restricting themselves to the narrow definitions. There is in the world today a great dynamic to the debate about income support, not just in Canada but throughout the industrial world. I hope the discussion in the house this afternoon will make an important contribution to that debate in Canada.

I think it will be helpful to begin by setting out something of the background of our present situation in regard to income support programs. Measures designed for the benefit of our old people have been introduced or acted upon in each year since 1963. In 1963 the old age security pension was raised from \$65 to \$75 a month for all those 70 years of age or over. In 1964 the Canada Pension Plan was introduced and a joint committee of the Senate and House of Commons was set up to study this proposal in detail and make any necessary improvements. This plan provided retired contributors with pensions up to \$104