

Old Age Security Act Amendment

am confident that if the government said that the house need not vote on the amendment moved by the member for Winnipeg North Centre and was prepared to bring in a simple amendment to the Old Age Security Act providing a pension of \$105 per month without a means test it would receive the complete support of this house and such a bill would move through all stages tonight.

Let me appeal to the Minister of National Health and Welfare, who is responsible for this legislation, to throw it out. I ask him to do this on the basis that in our kind of society an income test, calling it by the government's name, is inherently wrong so far as our old age pensioners are concerned. Other members during the course of this debate, including the hon. member for Grey-Bruce (Mr. Winkler) just now, have drawn attention to the horror with which many of our pensioners face the fact that a means test is coming. Attention has been drawn to the elements of discrimination in the test, which need not be repeated now.

• (8:30 p.m.)

I do want to say to the minister that what we are creating as a result of this legislation is a jungle in the field of old age pension legislation. There was a time, after many years of coping with this problem, when the parliament of Canada set up a special joint committee which went into the matter very thoroughly and came up with the recommendation of old age security, namely, a pension without a means test to all who reached a certain age. For a time that plan seemed to meet the needs of the aged in this country. True, the original amount had to be increased but the general plan seemed more or less satisfactory. But the time came when it was realized that old age security as a flat-rate program had to be matched with an earnings related program. Thus the Canada Pension Plan was evolved.

I am still prepared to say that those two plans, properly integrated, properly thought out in relation to each other, made a good pension package, the flat-rate old age security and the Canada Pension Plan on an earnings related basis. However, not enough thought was put into the relationship between the two plans. Not enough thought was given to what the amount of old age security should be in relation to the Canada Pension Plan. So the day came when the government began to try to fill the gaps. The first attempt to fill the gaps was the Canada Assistance Plan.

For a number of weeks we were told that it would solve the problem. The government soon discovered that even that plan did not fill

all the gaps, even that plan did not solve all the problems. So the government came along with another gap-filler, namely, this means test supplement to old age security. In addition to the four programs which I have named in this brief historical summary, there is also the Old Age Assistance Act. I recognize that it is phasing out as the eligible age for old age security drops year by year until it gets down to 65, but at least at the moment when this bill has been passed we will find ourselves in this country with five pieces of legislation respecting retirement in old age. Those five pieces of legislation are the Old Age Security Act, the Old Age Assistance Act, the Canada Pension Plan, the Canada Assistance Plan and now supplementary old age security payments.

This is not a well thought out plan. It is not the kind of plan that will stand for all time, as the Minister of National Health and Welfare said when he introduced this bill on second reading. This is not the kind of complete system of old age pensions that is good for all time, as the Minister of Finance (Mr. Sharp) said last night. If I may repeat myself, it is not a well thought-out plan. I suggest that the word used by the hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka (Mr. Aiken), namely, "jungle", does apply to this arrangement. I regret that the confusion that was already there, confusion brought about because of this business of filling the gaps instead of thinking through the whole situation, has been compounded by the action the government is now asking parliament to take.

But it is not too late to improve this situation. The kind of improvement that is really needed, of course, is to go back and think through the whole scheme, the whole program, the whole plan. At least until such time as there could be a recasting of the whole program we could avoid adding this fifth method of dealing with retirement and old age, namely, a \$30 supplement on a means test basis. The way to avoid that is simply to add the \$30 to the basic old age security pension and to pay the full \$105 without a means test of any kind.

I say to the Minister of National Health and Welfare, and if he were free to say so I think he would probably say he agrees with me, that the five-part plan we now have, or will have if this bill goes through, will not last; it will not be very long before changes will be made to it. In fact, I would not be surprised if the government in power today were to propose changes to it before the next election. If