

was too little too late. I suppose we can say the same thing about this bill which is before us today.

Our party is saying that the increase to \$100 a month basic pension is too little. Our party policy is to increase the pension to \$150 a month, and that indeed is the policy of most senior citizen organizations in this country. Indeed, the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens Federation at a recent convention in Prince Edward Island put forward the following resolution:

Be it resolved, that the federal government be requested to increase the basic old age security pension to \$150 per month retroactive to April, 1972. Be it further resolved, that the annual increase in said pension be in line immediately with the increase in the cost of living index.

When we talk about increasing the pension to \$150 a month we have the support of the Canadian people. Our party also, as I have already said, would like to see a reduction in the age of eligibility to 60. I think we could reach a consensus on that pretty quickly in the House if the minister desired to move in that direction. I know that he commented before the committee that the government was reassessing its social policy and that we may expect a statement some time in April. Indeed, I hope we do have one then and that we do have further legislation to lower the age of eligibility to 60 before this year is out.

I think that our party deserves a great deal of credit for the fact that there is a pension increase, even if it is only to \$100 a month. At present the old age pension is \$82.88. The automatic increase brought it up to \$86.61, and I suggest that if this government had come back after the election as a majority government, the pension would have stayed at that amount. I do not think it had any intention of raising the pension beyond the automatic increase of \$86.61, but I believe also that the situation would have been the same if the Conservative party had been in power following the election of October 30. As a matter of fact, during the election campaign I can recall very vividly a Conservative candidate saying that he favoured a pension of \$90 a month, while another one said he favoured \$95 a month. They could not make up their minds what it should be.

I wonder, if the Conservative party were to come to power in the future, whether they might not go back to the basic pension as it is now because in this area, as in most other areas, the Conservative party is, to say the least, very ambiguous. The Conservative party policies are different depending on which member is making the speech. The Conservatives cannot make up their minds as to what the pension should be. I recall also that, before the last election, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) was speaking in the province of British Columbia to a group of older people. When they asked him whether or not the Conservative party would support an increase in the pension to \$150 a month he said: "Oh, no, that is too expensive, the country cannot afford a pension of \$150 a month". That, I maintain, is the policy of the Conservative party. If they were in power they would do nothing more than the Liberal party is doing at this time to raise pensions for older people in this country.

I believe that we could increase the old age pension and I believe that the country can afford it. One way in which the government can raise pensions immediately to \$150 a month would be by withdrawing the bill which they plan

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to present to provide the corporations of this country with a rip-off or hand-out. If they did that they could provide half a billion dollars a year which could be used to raise old age pensions in this country. The corporations of this country do not need fast writes-offs and a reduction of the corporate income tax from 49 per cent to 40 per cent. If we were to defeat the bill or have it withdrawn, then the old people of this country could indeed have a pension increase of a kind that would provide them with money to buy the proper kinds of food, clothing and the type of housing that they need.

From the statistics I have available here, it appears that if we were to increase pensions immediately to \$150 a month, we would need about \$1 billion a year more over what is now being spent on old age pensions, half of that could be made up if we were not to pass the corporate tax bill and the other half could easily be obtained from the treasury of this country. If we were to raise pensions to only \$120 a month, we would only need \$432 million, and more than that would be available if the government decided not to proceed with the handout to the corporate welfare bums, their friends in the Canadian Manufacturers Association and their other corporate friends across this country. I suggest to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) that he present this argument to the government and that he bring back another bill which would increase the pension to \$150 a month, despite what the Conservative party may think and despite the crocodile tears they might shed over a few losses to their corporate friends in this country.

I also suggest that the pensionable age be reduced to 60. I believe that this country can afford quite easily to reduce the pensionable age. I believe that this is one of the social gaps in our country at this time. I know all of us have received many letters from people between the ages of 60 and 65 who need some assistance and who do not qualify because of the gaps we have in the existing social legislation in this country. This country could well afford to reduce the age of eligibility for old age pensions.

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Another thing that could be done immediately, if we do not want to go all the way at one time, would be to reduce the pensionable age for the spouse of someone who has already qualified for the old age pension. This is another gap in our social policy that should not be there, and I believe we could act to correct that immediately.

There are a number of other things that could be said regarding our senior citizens and other benefits that could be provided for them in terms of medical aid and assistance in purchasing prescription drugs. Many of our senior citizens live in poverty, in inadequate housing. These are the people who, after all, laid the foundations of our country. Many of them were pioneers in the western part of our country and deserve a better break than they are receiving today. This is a brief summary of some of the things that our party would like to see done for our senior citizens. We would like to see the basic old age pensions go up to \$150 a month, and the age of eligibility reduced to 60 years.

There is one other thing I would like to say in a philosophical vein before I sit down, and that is that we should