

Old Age Security Act Amendment

● (4:40 p.m.)

[Translation]

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Chairman, my hon. friend should have been here this afternoon, the one who sits on the committee on health and welfare, to deal with the matter, but he had to go to Montreal as a member of a parliamentary delegation.

Nevertheless, upon the introduction of this resolution, I wish to express our surprise. Although we had been given to understand that the amendment might be introduced in this form, I honestly thought that it would deal with the old age pension.

Mr. Chairman, I do not at all take this resolution as an amendment to the Old Age Security Act; in my opinion, it is simply a social welfare measure for the aged.

The present Social Welfare Act, as it exists in the province of Quebec, enables us to help the elderly to the extent of \$30 per month, after an investigation has been made. This temporary measure enables us to help the pensioners, those who receive the present \$75 cheque. This means that we can help the elderly in the province of Quebec up to a maximum of \$30 per month.

I heard it said that our old people will receive \$360 a year under this act. I would like to give a few explanations concerning these figures, because some people always seem to have the knack of holding up certain figures, but when we proceed to an examination of these figures, we find that they are greatly reduced.

The population expected something else from the present government, after all those fine promises. I can still recall the minister's jaunts into my riding. The ministers came one after the other—I think I got six, seven, maybe eight who promised \$100, with respect to old age pensions. A pension means "abstention". Abstention from any investigation. A pension is a certain sum granted to an individual as a matter of right, necessarily without any investigation. It is something owing, not charity. There were promises of \$100, \$105—several even promised up to \$125 per month.

Today, what is purely a social assistance measure is brought before the house. The legislation introduced is social assistance for the needy. They will get \$360 a year at the most, following an investigation and many inquiries—and heaven knows that older persons have to submit to numerous tests—they will get a \$5, \$10 or \$12 monthly increase, according to the inspector's generosity.

[Mr. Knowles.]

Mr. Chairman, since I have been sitting in parliament, I am fed up with all those investigation procedures which have but one purpose; to increase the number of bureaucrats and give, as it were, to employees taxes collected from the taxpayers and which should be used for the aged who have rendered services to their country and who deserve some reward.

As the two previous speakers pointed out—I do not wish to repeat their arguments—as a result of that legislation, everybody will be taxed for the benefit of a few. I feel that such will be the effect of that piece of legislation throughout the country.

The minister actually said, with regard to the eligibility requirements, that neither the contributions—for instance, the assistance given by children to their parents—nor the fact that a property owner benefits from a provincial contribution, will affect in any way the assistance provided by the government.

Well, if the provincial contributions are to have no effect whatsoever, some older people in the province of Quebec will surely get \$135 a month. The data provided by the minister in that connection were so vague that I wonder what the eligibility standards will be. There is nothing clear nor precise at the moment. And I think that this legislation, like all others which are brought in, is rather confused to make older people believe that they will obtain something when, in fact, they will only get a few dollars more per month.

Well, I prefer at the present time the assistance given in our province to the aged, that is an amount of \$75 and a supplementary benefit of \$30, because I believe that when this legislation is passed, Quebec will revoke the temporary legislation carried pending the stabilization of old age pensions.

I support the amendment moved by the Conservatives and I feel that it would be better to give everyone at least \$100 a month, whatever their income. Someone will say: Yes, but some do not need it. Well, Mr. Chairman, those who do not need it, those whose income is taxable will give it back when they pay their income tax, that is all. Then we would kill two birds with one stone. We would abolish that army of inspectors who will again poke around in the homes of our old people, and which costs almost as much.

The minister said: That will cost \$270 million. How can he be so sure? It might cost