

*Old Age Security Act Amendment*

vogue. Then he said this, as reported on the same page of *Hansard*:

The universal pay-as-you-go system which the government is now proposing makes no invidious distinction—as such systems in effect in some other countries do—between those who have made a stipulated number of contributions over a period of years and those who have not.

That, sir, was the major step forward taken by the parliament of 1951. Let me quote again from the then minister of national health and welfare. I am not always charitably disposed to him but he was a different man in 1951.

● (5:10 p.m.)

On page 386 I find these words:

If we are to gain a true impression of what we are accomplishing with this measure, we must look behind these statistics and remember that they comprise not just a vast cross-section of unknown persons but a true cross-section of our Canadian people. These people are our own neighbours, relatives, clergymen, factory-workers, railway workers, farmers, fishermen, civil servants, retired members of our police and fire departments, office workers, clerks, housewives and so on, all of them persons who have made their contribution to the building up of this country and who have made it possible to achieve the greatness which is recognized as Canada's in the world today.

I commend to the present minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. MacEachen) that attitude of mind, that form of expression, so that he may better understand the type of people in whom we are interested. We should not think of them as being just old age pensioners or statistics. These are people. These are neighbours of every one of us in this country. The hon. member for Essex East (Mr. Martin) had that in mind when he made his effective speech in 1951. Why cannot we accept a practice which has been in effect now for 15 years, instead of going back to make the invidious distinctions which prevailed when people were subjected to a means test?

In the course of that debate, the position taken by the hon. member for Essex East was supported by Mr. Donald Fleming, Hon. Donald Fleming as he later became. Those of us who remember him very well know he was a man who investigated with the greatest care every problem which presented itself. He made no hasty and ill-considered judgments. He was not one who would carelessly throw away or waste government money. He kept a close eye on expenditure when he became Minister of finance, and in the days when he was in opposition, in 1951, he was one of our leading spokesmen on matters of this nature.

Well, Mr. Donald Fleming was convinced of the rightness of abolishing the means test, and he had served on the joint committee of 1950.

[Mr. Churchill.]

I would just quote a passage from his speech as it appears on page 393. He had this to say:

I can give reasons why the committee recommended universal payments. First, it was felt that in the case of those who did not need the payments it would be a simple matter for the Minister of Finance if he so chose to draw them back in the way of taxes. In the second place, it was thought that the administrative problem would be considerable. It does not matter what figure you choose as the breaking point between those who will receive and those who will not; you are applying a means test. It may be that it would be an infinitely more generous means test than that which had prevailed hitherto, but nevertheless it would involve the application of such a test. That in turn would have brought with it almost all the objectionable features of the present administration of the means test. It would mean that you would be penalizing thrift in many cases while making payments in other cases to those who had not generally practised equal thrift. It would have meant more intrusion on the part of officials into the affairs of individuals. For these and other very good reasons, not least of all being the administrative difficulty of enforcing such a test as compared with the administrative ease with which money could be taken back in taxes from those who did not need it, the committee arrived. I think soundly, at the conclusion that the simplest and most effective system was the universal system.

That argument holds true today. It is just as cogent and important as it was in the fall of 1951. Why is the present Minister of National Health and Welfare rejecting sound arguments of that kind? The two men I have mentioned, the hon. member for Essex East and Hon. Donald Fleming have made outstanding contributions to the life of this institution and to Canada.

They were not the only ones who took part in that debate. I will not quote from the speech made by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) because we have heard him often on this subject. But he played a prominent part and made a very effective contribution for his party. Of course, without any shadow of doubt, he supported the abolition of the means test.

Then, speaking for the Social Credit party of that day, the hon. member who sat for Red Deer, Mr. F. D. Shaw, also supported the measure before the house. I will quote briefly from what he said as reported on page 402 and commend these words to the members of the Social Credit party who are in the house today.

May I refer first to the abolition of the means test in connection with this universal old age pension? We have always taken issue with the means test. I am compelled to believe that we in turn have been forced into that position over the years because of two very important factors. In the first place there was never uniformity of administration.