

Mr. Rose: Mr. Speaker, I wanted to make something clear. I did say that British Columbia was now paying a basic income of \$200 per month to people of 65 and over and to the disabled and the blind. I think this measure came into effect just before Christmas; in fact I am sure it did. I agree with the minister that there is nothing to prevent other provinces doing the same.

Mr. Lalonde: My point is this: I do not want to stop the provinces from doing this. I think they deserve to be congratulated if they do it. According to the figures of January 3 that I have, a couple on social assistance in the province of which the hon. member spoke are paid \$169, while if they are 65 or over they can get over \$400. In Saskatchewan, a couple are paid \$176 if they are 64 or 59 years old—choose your age—while a couple in receipt of the federal old age pension will get \$325. In Ontario, they are getting \$235; in Quebec, \$158; in New Brunswick, \$180; in Manitoba, \$179; in Nova Scotia and P.E.I., \$200; in Newfoundland, \$195. That is the situation with regard to people who are on welfare. Hon. members should compare those figures with the \$325 that will be available to couples under our old age pension. The Cr ditistes have proposed an amendment that will permit an amount greater than \$400 to be paid to a couple. If you take \$400 plus the GIS, the amount would come up to around \$525 per couple. That is very nice. Why not bring it up to \$600 while you are at it, or \$700 while the auction is under way?

We must think about all the other people who are on welfare. There are many people on welfare in the ridings represented by members of the Cr ditiste party, as they may well know. They should consider what they are doing. We will embark, with the provinces, on the consideration of all these aspects of poverty. This is not the time to push ahead with large increases of the sort recommended by the Cr ditistes or with lowering the eligibility age and thus using a large amount of our resources for that purpose. I have already given the figures to the House. If money is used in one way, it will not be available for abandoned mothers, for the handicapped or those below 65 or 60 who experience difficulties in life for a variety of reasons.

We will meet with the provinces, and the House and the committee of the House will have the opportunity to consider the social security review. I hope that this House and the Standing Committee on National Health and Welfare will have the opportunity of considering this matter in a broad context, instead of entering into an auction between various parties who want to see which one will bid highest for the votes of senior citizens.

I repeat, my appearance before a committee of the House at this juncture on this particular amendment will achieve nothing except the further delay of the adoption of this bill. If this bill is delayed further, we will know where to place the blame. Second, I am committed to make known to parliament as soon as possible before the conference—I hope to be able to do this—our various proposals in the field of social security review. I hope the Standing Committee on National Health and Welfare will have the time and opportunity to consider these proposals, as well as the provinces with whom we will meet at the end of April.

Old Age Security Act

In conclusion, not wanting to take up any more of the time of the House, may I say that all parties have agreed that we should speed up the consideration of this legislation so that the senior citizens of this country may receive the increases that are due to them. We should proceed to the adoption of this particular bill immediately, Mr. Speaker. We will have plenty of time to consider the other arguments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Joliette (Mr. La Salle) rises on a question of privilege.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, as far as the question of privilege is concerned, I just want to reply to the minister's question as to where the hon. member for Joliette was, if he was not in committee. I should be very smart if I said that last week I was sitting on the Agriculture committee and did not see the minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) there. I know he has other duties to carry out and that effectively he cannot be everywhere at the same time. However, I should remind the minister that I have never missed an opportunity in the House to inform him of my opinion about the bill. He has received copy of my correspondence and also a resolution prepared by the Conseil central des syndicats catholiques, and I feel that he cannot truthfully say he is not aware of my views.

Therefore, the argument I am supporting is one I consider to be valid, although the minister stressed his great willingness to do more and better. I appreciate that very much, but we do feel immediate action is important.

[*English*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member really has not stated a question of privilege. The hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie).

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, I should like to say a few words about the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Joliette (Mr. La Salle). I will be the only spokesman for my party on this item because, as the minister rightly said, throughout this entire debate we have endeavoured to suggest that we should expedite the measure. Puny though the measure is, it should be given birth. I wonder how much the cost of living has increased during the month in which this matter has been debated.

Mr. Hees: Quite a bit.

Mr. Macquarrie: On the other hand, I think it would be well, after the minister's outburst, to adopt a somewhat more reasonable tone. I will not use that tone which he used when replying to members of the Social Credit party. I am not given to making long speeches, nor am I very fond of our having a series of long speeches although I admit the right of hon. members to speak. If we were to hear all members of my party who have concern for the older citizens of the country, Santa Claus himself would deliver their cheques. However, we must refrain from expressing our views and we must expedite this measure.

The minister was good enough to quote the remarks I made in committee. Although I am a man of the utmost