

Old Age Security Act

Welfare (Mr. Munro) has introduced but because it is one of those occasions when we are reminded that persistence does pay.

• (1740)

I did a little chasing through the records last night and this morning. I did not begin to turn up all the occasions upon which members of this party have pleaded for improvements in old age pensions and changes of one sort or another. But time after time the answer from this minister and his predecessors has been no. Time after time, when votes have been possible, we have lost those votes. In my own experience this goes back for three decades. I can remember the late J. L. Ilsley telling me I was asking for too much because I wanted the \$20 pension raised to \$25. So today we are reminded of the fact that persistence pays.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): It is inflation that does it, really.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): And just as I have given what I hope is a word of encouragement to pensioners and to their organizations to carry on their activities, I say to the government and to the people of Canada generally that we shall continue to press for what we believe these people are entitled to receive, namely, a scale of pensions which will make it possible for those who have retired not just to be kept alive but to share in the standard of living which they, in their working years, helped to make possible.

I suspect it is desirable for us to say early in our response to this bill how we intend to vote and why. We are voting for the bill. I am sure this will come as no surprise. After all, we gave consent at the beginning of the day's sitting for the bill to be read the first time and printed so that it could be discussed without delay.

Mr. Munro: I hope David has not changed his mind since then.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): You look after your own stand. Even though it is a bill which is terribly inadequate in that the amounts of increases offered are terribly low, we feel that these amounts should be put into the hands of our senior citizens as soon as possible. We feel they should get them without delay even though for those on a pension of \$80 the increase will amount to only \$2.88 a month, which does not go very far these days, and even though for those on the guaranteed income supplement, at the maximum the increase amounts to only \$15 a month in the case of a single person and \$30 a month in the case of a married couple. These amounts should not be denied for one week if we can avoid it, and that is why we are prepared not only to vote for the bill before us but to do what we can to expedite its passage into law.

In saying this, however, I should like to make it clear that we believe the government is trying to fob off our old people with an amount which is a disgrace to a country which is producing goods and services to the tune of \$95 billion. In effect, we are saying to those whose efforts have helped to build up our country and make all this possible, that all we can do now is to increase their pensions by \$2.88 a month, or \$15 a month if they have

nothing else. That is not good enough for a country like Canada.

I come now to the fourth point I want to make, and perhaps it is time to take the gloves off. I have been here for a long time. I have seen a good many examples of sheer, crass cynicism on the part of several governments. But seldom have I seen anything as cynical as the performance on the part of the government in connection with this piece of legislation.

Mr. Munro: That is coming from an expert, judging from the debate on family allowances.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): The minister makes some references to family allowances. In the bill on family allowances he is forsaking a principle which it took the Liberals 50 years to accept. In this bill the minister is at least going back in some measure, to that principle, the principle of universality, and this is why, despite the smallness of the amounts involved, we find it is a bill we cannot oppose.

But to me this is an example of crass political cynicism, the sort of thing which makes the people of Canada wonder what politics and parliament and government are all about. The reason for asking the House to deal with this bill today and to put it through as quickly as possible was stated by the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) this afternoon: it was in order that the increases provided for in the bill could, if possible, be included in the cheques which go out at the end of June. What are the increases for which the bill provides? In the case of those drawing only \$80 a month—and according to the last return they numbered 778,480, or 45 per cent of those over the age of 65—the increase which the government wishes to get into their cheques at the end of June amounts to \$2.88 a month, that is, 3.6 per cent of the basic \$80.

Mr. Speaker, this is the era of cabinet leaks. I intend to spill another one. No. I am making this up, of course, though I am sure I might have got away with it had I pretended to state what went on in cabinet as though I had been there. They discussed this matter. The question was asked, "What about this increase of \$2.88 a month? If we can get it to the old age pensioners by the end of June, and if we can persuade the opposition to let it go through, and if we call an election for July, say July 17, will that \$2.88 be enough to persuade the 778,480 people who are on \$80 a month to vote Liberal?" "No," said one of the cabinet ministers, "that is not enough. After all, Walter Harris tried six bucks and that didn't work, and a couple of years ago the present minister tried 42 cents, and that's why there has been so much opposition to this government from old age pensioners." So one of the smarter ministers—

An hon. Member: Which one?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Oh, I am not telling you that. His name is not part of my leak. One of the smarter ministers said, "You know, there is a way in which we could take care of this. Instead of making the increase effective just for the June cheque, we could make it retroactive to January 1. We have already provided that the old age security payments are paid on a fiscal