

Old Age Security Act Amendment

something for some of the people; I have no intention of supporting it as an example of the proper way of dealing with the pensions structure. In the end, I believe, we shall be obliged to turn to the deficit income tax system. Before we do so it will be necessary to amalgamate all our social security measures into one piece of legislation. There will be no further playing with pensions. That will belong to the past. Every Canadian, whether he works or not, whether he is in good health or not, will be entitled to a basic income as of right. Until we have reached that stage, the social security and welfare programs of this nation will not have reached standards which I believe all Canadians would support.

[Translation]

Hon. Théogène Ricard (Saint-Hyacinthe-Bagot): Mr. Speaker, the needs of our senior citizens are so pressing, more particularly so in view of the continuously rising cost of living, that I would in no way want to delay passage of Bill No. C-251. Even though I feel that this legislation is not perfect, I would not want to deprive senior citizens of the small amount of comfort which the legislation provides.

However, I greatly fear that those who expect a cheque soon after January 1, 1967 will be a bit disappointed, because I believe that it will be some time before the effects of the legislation are felt.

Although I have no intention of making a long speech so as not to delay passage of the bill, my obligation to the pensioners in my riding forces me to call the attention of the house for a moment to the views of the senior citizens back home. I wish to acquaint the hon. minister with the observations of retired citizens, with whom I am quite regularly in contact on week-ends.

The minister will surely be interested to learn that I have yet to meet one old age pensioner who welcomes this piece of legislation, that is, Bill No. C-251. All those I met complained that this measure would not satisfy them fully.

Moreover, a great number of older people cannot see the difference between a means test and a needs test. They think that either one will deprive them of an income they greatly need. Our older people convey their feelings in a most vivid way when they say: Whether you are bitten by a black dog or a white dog, there is no difference because it hurts just as much.

Mr. Speaker, it is generally agreed that this legislation, in its present form is a kind

[Mr. Peters.]

of tax on thrift. Those who, in their youth, have tried to save up to meet their obligations when they retire realize that there is some discrimination against them and they say: It is a tax on economy.

Mr. Speaker, I would like, for example, the minister to hear the conversation at meetings of the Golden Age Clubs.

How I would like to see the minister in St. Hyacinthe listening to old age pensioners when they start comparing the amount each of them will be receiving under Bill No. C-251. He would see, for instance, that some would be receiving perhaps \$30, others \$20, \$10, \$5 or even only \$2, while many—those who have saved in their youth—would get absolutely nothing. The minister would then see for himself that Bill No. C-251, as it now stands, would create dissatisfaction and dissension.

• (4:10 p.m.)

It is painful for a senior citizen, at the age of retirement, to find that, after all the efforts he has made, he will not get the same compensation as his neighbour. This will generate countless difficulties among our people.

In his remarks, the minister told us that, in order to qualify for benefits or a supplement under this legislation, applicants will have to complete a very simple form and that nobody should suffer inconveniences. This seems to me somewhat surprising and I shall repeat here what senior citizens told me: How come an arbitration board is being established to settle disputes in certain cases, if those forms are so simple to fill out and if no one is to be deprived of what he is entitled to? In that regard, I would like the minister to give us more details, so that our aged citizens might know for sure. Indeed, they fear the obligation to complete forms in order to obtain money which they feel reverts to them.

Mr. Speaker, since the start of this session particularly, my party has done its utmost to convince the government that it ought to grant a \$25 monthly increase to all Canadians reaching the age of retirement. I believe that this is the most equitable way of doing justice to everybody. In order to administer Bill No. C-251, no doubt a legion of civil servants will be necessary, and the resulting costs for the public treasury will be quite above the savings made in the way the minister has asserted when he introduced his legislation in the house.