

Old Age Security Act

gave us is one that older persons did not deserve. I agree with my friends of the Social Credit on the increase in pensions. I agree that the age of eligibility should be lowered, but I cannot agree with their tactics which only too often use human hardship to promote their own interests.

• (2200)

[English]

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I had no intention of taking part in this debate, but in view of the remarks of the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie), the last person in the Conservative party caucus from whom I would have expected to hear such remarks, I think I should reply.

If the hon. member for Hillsborough and his colleagues consider the amount of money that the senior citizens of Canada are entitled to, and should be receiving, a political option, then we now know for certain where the Conservative party stands on this issue. Had the Conservative party made some definitive statement in terms of dollars and cents per month since the first of September last and the end of December, it probably would not have been a political option; indeed, they could now be occupying the treasury benches. Refusal to specify the exact sum, except in vague terms of cost of living index which would have brought the old age pension to something around \$95 a month, meant that they lost what the hon. member for Hillsborough called the political option.

At least the Liberal party did not say anything during the election campaign about how much the pension should be raised. Then they came forward with something definite, the \$100 figure. The hon. member for Hillsborough is now curling behind the glass. They can do better, he says, and he mumbles vaguely about a figure of \$106. I remember in 1956 the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) was wagging his finger at the Liberal benches and talking about the "six bucks boys". Who are the "six bucks boys" now? Those who are going up from \$100 to \$106.

In addition to that, they have the gall to accuse the members of the Creditiste Party of delaying the passage of this bill when had their efforts succeeded on three or four previous occasions since January 4 this parliament would not have been sitting and there would not have been any increase in old age pensions. They have the gall to continue this kind of hypocrisy in respect of a debate on old age pensions. This shows them up, Mr. Speaker. Normally, I am very kind, quiet and benign in respect of my good friends in the Conservative Party, but tonight they have reached a low or a high, whichever way one looks at it. Certainly, we have some concrete evidence that the official opposition, the Conservative Party, has no policy and refuses to recognize the legitimate needs of the senior citizens of Canada in terms of the amount of dollars they should receive per month.

Where were they last October and last November? Had they responded in some positive manner to the proposals made by the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) on November 15, they could have been sitting on that side of the House by January 15. They sat and would not speak up. Now, the curling game is over. The hon. member for

[Mr. Wagner.]

Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie) is out behind the curtain. He never misses a shot. He regards us as being inadequate. What about last night? We do not consider this to be trafficking in political options. We consider this a golden opportunity. I hope the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde), even at this eleventh hour, would propose that this bill be sent back to the committee for one day or if it is not in order for him to do so I would hope that right now he would make a significant gesture to the senior citizens by stating that this increase will be retroactive to the first of January so that they will receive some modest recognition.

He could also call upon his colleagues in the cabinet to implement a rent freeze to prevent the erosion of this increase in the old age pension. In some housing projects in some cities, already the entire increase has been eaten up through rent increases. The least the Minister of National Health and Welfare could do now at this eleventh hour would be to introduce a three-months retroactivity in respect of the pension increase to enable the old age pensioners to pay the unconscionable rent increases.

The hon. member for Hillsborough calls this a political auction. Who does he think he is kidding? In my opinion that is an unconscionable thing for him to say. He is the last member from whom I would expect to hear this. He has colleagues who are political dinosaurs from whom I would expect such things, but I would not expect them from him. If he, the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe (Mr. Wagner) or the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) had any compassion back in November, December or January they would have said that a Conservative government would implement an old age pension increase to not less than \$110 or \$120 a month. They cannot have it both ways. Yet now they say they would do better.

Mr. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the hon. member would allow a question?

Mr. Speaker: Is the hon. member rising on a point of order?

Mr. Alexander: Heavens no, Mr. Speaker. I just want to ask the hon. member a question.

Mr. Speaker: The Chair recognizes the hon. member for Bellechasse.

Mr. Alexander: I wonder whether I have agreement to ask the hon. member—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Alexander: On a point of order, now.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member has a heavenly point of order.

• (2210)

Mr. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I thought that when you rose you were going to recognize me inasmuch as I indicated during his speech that I wanted to ask the hon. member a question. I thought at that time you were going to allow me to ask the question. I then saw that I would not be recognized, and now I hope Your Honour will have