

Old Age Security Act Amendment

all Scrooges. The Canadian people want to do the right thing for our older citizens. They will agree that these pensions should be paid and they will agree that these pensions should be raised across the board without a means test, a needs test or an income test of any kind.

Let me say again, that in all of this it is important that we meet the needs of our elderly people. We are not meeting their needs with a pension of \$105 a month when our welfare people have informed us that our elderly people require \$138 a month. But even more important than the monetary needs of our older people is their right to dignity and self-respect.

I have been connected with this question long enough now to be able to say that I know the difference—I have seen it with my own eyes—between people who were on the pension in the 1930's and 1940's and people who have been on the pension in the 1950's and 1960's. In the 1930's and 1940's to be on pension was a disgrace. In the 1950's and 1960's people have been proud to be on pension. The abolition of the means test made the difference. Now, we are changing this by saying that people who will now be on pension are those who are submitting themselves to this kind of test.

I submit, Mr. Chairman, that when you take away dignity and self-respect from any group of citizens of this country, which is what this proposal will do, you are doing something that ought not to be the business of parliament. There is no point in the minister getting worked up over the use of the phrase "guaranteed annual income". He is borrowing the phrase from thinking which is related to the working period of people's lives and is trying to use the phrase to justify a means test program. The present \$75 a month is a guaranteed annual income to our people; and \$105 a month would be a guaranteed annual income for our older people in just the same way if only they all received it regardless of their situation or any other income they may have.

The minister has provided us with some details which we will look into further before we get through second reading and into the committee of the whole stage of the bill, but I submit that the complications which are wrapped up in this bill are just not worth the trouble. This will become apparent very soon when the minister begins to hear from the elderly people across the country about their

feelings of horror and regret that this step has been taken.

The Liberals on the other side of the house applauded the minister when he made his statement today, but let me tell hon. gentlemen opposite as well as the minister that this is a political mistake. The minister said he hoped that the opposition parties would not try to get too much political mileage out of it. But the opposition parties do not need to get mileage out of it.

Mr. Douglas: Leave that to the appeal board.

Mr. Knowles: As my leader says, the appeal board will do that. It is the government party itself which is retreating politically by making a mistake in this field, a field in which they made a mistake once before. The government thought in 1957, when it lent millions of dollars to the pipe line people, that it could win the election that year by granting a \$6 increase in the old age pension; but the government learned otherwise. If the government today thinks that it can poll the support of the older Canadian people with this kind of program, then let me tell the minister and the government that members on that side of the house will find once more that it is otherwise.

The Canadian people like dignity and self-respect; they like the fairness of the old age security plan which pays pensions to all of our old age pensioners as a right. I submit that this is the plan that should remain intact, whatever happens to the amendment that has been proposed by the Leader of the Opposition. I can see procedural difficulties but I will not raise them. However, I wish he had asked for \$105 a month. If the government is prepared to go that far, then let us give the pensioners \$105 a month without a means test. But whatever happens, I hope that the government will take this debate seriously, as it should take debates in parliament, and will decide even yet that the thing to do is to increase the pension across the board without instituting a means test.

These are my closing words, even though I repeat myself, Mr. Chairman. If the government will adopt my suggestion, it will not have to tell the Canadian people that our pensioners will not get this increase until the end of March; they will get it in their very next cheques. This, Mr. Chairman, is what this parliament ought to demand.