

Andras) in the House. I think he would agree that not only must we have pensions but we must have homes in which our retired people can live in respect and dignity. I hope the members of this House will accept the amendment.

Mr. R. N. Thompson (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, as we approach the Christmas season we will be reminded on television and from our reading of what is regarded as the greatest Christmas play of all time, "The Christmas Carol". As I listened to the debate today it seemed to me that the Scrooge of "The Christmas Carol" is found in this House in Bill C-202, and in a way that we in this enlightened age ought to think twice about. Surely, the Christmas present that we are putting together for the old age pensioners of Canada can be described as nothing more than the device of a Scrooge who is as hard-hearted as the government.

Mr. Francis: Fifty-five dollars a month supplement.

Mr. Thompson: The hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis) talks about the guaranteed income supplement. I shall have something to say about that. I would have thought his experience of bureaucracy in government would have told him that to devise a means test which for a single person might be applied in 55 different ways will do nothing but perpetuate bureaucracy and work hardship on those who really need our consideration and help. I say that kindly to the hon. member, because if this bill is implemented on the selectivity principle outlined therein, we shall be reverting to the means test system, one that will be more vicious than any we have had hitherto in our welfare legislation. It will be a retrograde form of means test that will be much more severe than the income tax reports used by some provinces to determine the premium that people in the low-income bracket should pay for health services insurance.

Much has been said in recent years about bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada. During the last election campaign the "deux nations" theory came in for a lot of discussion and heated debate. I believe that the real division in Canada has nothing to do with language, culture or politics in its most bitter form, but is the critical dividing line that cuts across all of these and separates Canada into two distinct groups. The first is the affluent Canada, the productive Canada where the majority enjoy a generally adequate standard of living, where cultural and educational facilities are readily accessible. This Canada is exemplified by the skyscrapers, high-rise apartment complexes, new subdivisions, luxurious schools and universities, a rising standard of living and new opportunities. In effect, it is the Canada where people are in the mainstream of our economic way of life. The population of this Canada is about 17 million.

• (8:30 p.m.)

On the other hand, there is a second Canada with which very few of us are familiar. It is the Canada where more than 4.5 million Canadians are trapped in poverty.

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Their level of income is below the \$3,000 a year poverty line suggested by the Economic Council of Canada. These people are not to be found in one province; they are found in every province, in every major city as well as in the rural parts of Canada. This is the have-not Canada. With this legislation we are dealing with one of the larger groups in this have-not Canada, the old age pensioners, people who are past 65 years of age. There are, as well, the working poor and the unemployed. Probably there is no group in the have-not Canada to whom we as legislators in Parliament have a greater responsibility than those in the senior citizen group. On the eve of Christmas, as we are dealing with the welfare of these people and the amount of money that is available for them to live on, certainly it is only fitting that we should be doing so with a little more compassion than this bill indicates.

Perhaps the most comprehensive study of poverty undertaken in Canada is now being conducted by the Senate Committee on Poverty. The chairman of that committee, Senator Croll, in his report to the committee on its findings on November 11 and 12 made a number of significant statements. Time does not permit one to quote all of the important parts of his report, but there are one or two passages which should be brought to the attention of the House. He said:

The low-income worker, the aged, the handicapped, the social welfare recipient, the single head of family, is becoming more and more alienated from society which each is desperately trying to rejoin. The poverty of our people, the unemployment, the 600,000 long-term welfare recipients in the province of Quebec clearly indicate, as they put it in the brief... that we are becoming a nation of beggars.

Those words were not spoken by anyone representing this party in the Senate. They were spoken by a distinguished Senator who belongs to the government party. He went on to say:

I think what is required is a net to catch all those who, for any number of legitimate reasons, are unable to provide themselves with an adequate income. These people are our poor. Their numbers are a disgrace. They are the elderly, who helped to build this society, the handicapped who are unable to compete, through no fault of their own, and the working poor, who strive and aspire, like all of us, to a decent way of life, but regardless of how hard they try they are unable to catch up. They are forever losers under our present system. Up to now we have always said that the fault is with the individual. I think it is time that we looked around at the system and let it share some of the responsibility. For those who fall into this net we must provide, as a matter of right, a decent living and access to quality services which are easily obtainable.

The amendment to the legislation, which we will be voting on later this evening, seeks to deal with one segment of our society about whom Senator Croll was talking, our senior citizens. I think it is a downright disgrace and a travesty of justice that we should be making available, as the bill does, this pittance compared with what the Senate committee had in mind.

Senator Croll continued in the following words. I realize this is a general statement but it does relate to our legislation in a most acute way:

Those appearing before us were unanimous in the view that the public welfare system has broken down, mired in bureaucracy