

Old Age Security

I pointed out that the hon. member for Algoma (Mr. Foster) had picked up another point with regard to family allowances. In a rather clever way, the government amended the Income Tax Act with the result that people earning over \$10,000 a year will not be entitled to family allowance nor, Mr. Speaker, will they be able to claim the \$550 deduction previously available. This will now be reduced to \$300. This move is the second stage of the government's masterpiece of deception.

● (2:10 p.m.)

The Parliamentary Secretary also mentioned yesterday that he had received many phone calls and letters from constituents in praise of the bill. In one of my question, I pointed out that he should consider replying to these people by informing them what will happen if the bill passes prior to Christmas. If the bill passes prior to Christmas, the people who are receiving the old age security pension, but who are not entitled to the guaranteed income supplement, will get a mere \$80 as of January 1. Those who are entitled to the guaranteed income supplement will receive it as of April 1. On the other hand, if this bill does not pass, and I expect Liberal members will try to help their aged constituents, the automatic 2 per cent escalation provision will remain in effect and those people, instead of getting \$80, will receive \$81.17. I am sure that government supporters will want to delay the passage of this bill so that our older people can obtain slightly more money.

The hon. member for Winnipeg—

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): It is Winnipeg North Centre.

Mr. Gilbert: I meant to say the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, Mr. Speaker. He is our leading spokesman in this House on the matter of pensions.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Gilbert: The poor old minister had difficulty in understanding what the hon. member said the other day in his speech. Clearly, the poor old minister had difficulty in understanding what was obvious. The hon. member, in his opening remarks, said that not only will this measure redistribute old age poverty, but that it is a bad bill. He set out his reasons for that and I shall develop his reasons as I go along.

The Parliamentary Secretary said that this bill was a good bill and that he had received many compliments from his constituents. I think the minister and Liberal supporters ought to hear what other experts have to say about the bill and the white paper on income security. I wish to read an excerpt from the *Toronto Telegram* of Tuesday, December 1. The article deals with what Dr. Frei, the director of the Metro Social Planning Council of Toronto and others had to say about the matter. The article reads in part:

Increases proposed for old age pensioners—minimums of \$135 for single persons and \$225 for couples—were 'less than our organization had asked the Government for, but a lot better than they have been getting.

[Mr. Gilbert.]

'At least now pensioners shouldn't have to scrounge for food the way they have been.'

Dr. Frei—the director of the Metro Social Planning Council said the pension increases proposed would mean that pensioners 'are now slowly approaching the position where they can at least exist.'

I thought the Parliamentary Secretary ought to know what the director of the Metro Social Planning Council of Toronto had to say about the subject. The article goes on to report what Miss Ethel Neilson, president of the Senior Women's Committee for Pension Increases had to say: The article reports that she:

—did not lament the proposed dropping of cost-of-living increments to pension.

'The increases were so small they really didn't make much of a difference anyway,' she said.

Although she said her group had been hoping for an increase to \$150 a month for single pensioners, the proposed \$135 would be a significant improvement.

'At least now people will have enough to buy adequate food.'

She voiced a fear that was repeated by several of those commenting on the proposals—that landlords would nullify proposed benefits by increasing pensioners' rents.

'I would like to see them freeze rents for old age pensioners', Miss Neilson said.

According to David Maben, head of St. Christopher House, which is in constant touch with pensioners in the city's depressed west end, increases in rent take place whenever pensions are raised.

Miss Neilson added that even with the proposed increases, pensioners would not be able to afford to buy new clothes. And the lodging they would be able to afford would still consist of shabby one-room flats with shared kitchen and bathroom facilities.

I think the Parliamentary Secretary ought to be acutely aware of the comments of people such as these. I hope, after the bill has been referred to the Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs for study, that the committee will travel across Canada, meet in the different highly populated centres, and hear representations of bodies such as the Social Planning Council, various welfare organizations, and so on, in order to gain an inside view of the difficulties of those old age pensioners with whom such organizations must deal. The committee ought to travel across Canada and listen to the views of pensioners. Not only that it should, as a group, go into the homes of pensioners, into the shabby flats that Miss Neilson mentioned, and see how they live every day. They should see what food they buy, partake of a meal with the pensioners and see what sort of clothing pensioners can afford. That ought to be done before the legislation passes. That is the type of study we need in connection with this particular bill.

Mr. Ryan: Tell the committee to bring their lunch and not partake of a poor pensioner's meal.

Mr. Gilbert: I hope the Parliamentary Secretary will take notice of this advice, and I hope the committee will travel across Canada to hear the views of those different organizations that deal with our senior citizens.