

out this business of fencing them behind provincial walls or language barriers. I want this income barrier taken down. It seems to me this is a logical step toward a just society. We should let people exercise their initiative and earn what they can, then let them pay taxes the same as anyone else. Our attitude indicates the survival of the old poorhouse mentality. It is bad enough to have people who are elderly and poor without reminding them they are second class citizens. I would appreciate a reply from the minister on these points.

Mr. Perrault: I believe hon. members of the house, on both sides, Mr. Chairman—and this has been expressed in recent hours—are impressed by the minister and his approach to the problems of health and welfare of the Canadian people. All of us have great hopes for health and welfare in this nation, under the direction and guidance of the new minister. I find myself in sympathy with some of the problems raised by members on both sides of this house during the discussion of these estimates. In my opinion, one of the great tragedies facing many Canadians today is the diminution in the purchasing power of the dollar, and the disastrous effect this is having on those living on fixed incomes, namely retired civil servants, retired members of the R.C.M.P. and other pensioners. These people put their dollars away in savings, having earned their salaries at a time when a dollar was worth a dollar in terms of purchasing power.

• (4:40 p.m.)

They now find, Mr. Chairman, after years of being good citizens and taxpayers, that they are receiving dollars that simply do not purchase the means to maintain a decent standard of living. This is a matter that should be the concern of all of us, regardless of party; it is not a partisan question. We should do everything in our power within the ability of the nation to improve the level of compensation for those on pension, regardless of where they live in the country and the amount of pension they enjoy.

In actual fact, Mr. Chairman, all of us have a responsibility to these people, who in a sense, have been legally deprived of their means. If they had had money stolen from their bank accounts, then this would have been an indictable offence. But society has condoned and given a kind of legal sanction to the diminution of the purchasing power of

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the dollar. We all bear a collective responsibility to help these people within the ability of the economy to provide for them.

At the same time, Mr. Chairman—and this was well stated by the hon. member for Ottawa West—if we provide increases in social welfare payments, with an utter disregard for the state of the economy and the effect that such increases may have upon inflation, then it could well be that many of these increases would be self-defeating, that any increase in purchasing power would be illusory and be eroded by inflation. I think that all members of the house are sympathetic to the problems of our elderly people, our senior citizens, many of whom are suffering from physical disability. We should be very mindful of their plight.

Shortly, Mr. Chairman, we are going to engage in our quadrennial orgy of self-recrimination about our failure at the Olympic games. Every year we undergo an exercise in national anguish when we stumble at the world hockey tournament. On a cyclical basis we engage in breast beating about our commonwealth games humiliations. I believe, Mr. Chairman, that we have to do far more to extend assistance to health and welfare programs in the area of athletic development and physical fitness.

On looking at the estimates for this year,—and I say this not by way of criticism—I find that we are budgeting for an increase of over \$3 million in grants to the Canada Council. The level of support for fitness and amateur sport remains exactly the same. The total dedicated to the Canada Council is \$20.5 million; the amount to fitness and amateur sport is the same. I am not opposed to the advancement of culture in our country, Mr. Chairman, but I am one of those critics, I am afraid, who does not think that public funds are being well spent when we import people from New York to smash pianos in Vancouver and pour blood over the result. This, Mr. Chairman, is supposed to provide some sort of experience for the audience. As I say, this is not money well spent.

I believe, Mr. Chairman, that what we have to do, as far as our young people and society generally are concerned, is to invest more money in a positive program to promote and advance the intellectual, cultural and, yes, the athletic development of our youth. I think this would be worth a hundred times as much as any expenditure for the creation of