

kind of circumstances. This is the tragedy of the spinster age 60 to 65 who has no way at all to obtain a spouse's allowance.

This seems fatefully unfair. For example, if there were twin sisters and one marries at age 63 a man of 65 and if they could qualify for the GIS she could draw an allowance equal to the old age pension, but the twin sister who did not marry could not. It is a discrimination which I would like to see removed, particularly in these days when the difficulty of putting food on the table and heating your domicile is so apparent to everyone except the government.

I would also like to mention for a moment the problem which this government created. It galls me how it can bring in certain legislation. I believe that in some cases they were pressured into it, but in other cases they actually have the right motive. It brought in a reform to the old age pension which would make one ill if they read the puffery with which they brought in the 1977 reforms to the old age pension. One of the proposals was a partial old age pension. It was introduced as if the government was doing something for pensioners. It was doing something for the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston) not for the pensioners. A partial old age pension means that if you come to Canada at age 55, at age 65 you get a partial old age pension. For decades, if a person came to Canada at age 55 and lived to age 65, that person could get the old age pension. The government decided to save the Treasury Board some money, and that has changed. Now a person gets only one-quarter of the old age pension if a person lives here for ten years. It does not accelerate the next year you live here because although you are drawing a pension, you are not qualifying for an eleven-year pension, you stay at the ten-year pension provision for the rest of your life. It guarantees absolute poverty for some people in my riding. I have a list of several hundred people who have been caught in this trap. One of the tragedies, I suppose, is that part of this problem is due to the government. It left in circulation in several foreign countries pamphlets describing the 1976 old age security system in Canada. In that literature the only requirement for a full pension was to be in Canada for ten years. At the time, I said the partial old age pension would lead to catastrophe. I can assure hon. members that it has done so.

● (1250)

I would like to speak about a difficult subject, and that is the reciprocity of pensions. This government seems to be unable to be honest about anything any more. I expect everyone received a letter addressed to members of the House of Commons and Senate wherein the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) claims that she has done a great deal to try to achieve reciprocity of pensions. She starts off by talking about what she did on October 14. In part, this letter reads:

On October 22, while in London on my fact-finding trip on pension reform, I met with the Honourable Patrick Jenkin, Secretary of State for Social Services. The first item which I brought up was the possibility of reopening of negotiations between Canada and the United Kingdom toward a social security agreement.

No conclusion was reached and the minister concluded there was no sense in keeping the door open. I have a letter

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addressed to me as an individual member of Parliament from the same minister who points out something she does not care to do in the letter to members of the House of Commons and Senate. She gives a little more history on the subject. For those members who do not understand reciprocity of pensions, basically, it allows people from another land to come to Canada and receive pensions from their home country which would be indexed. We would do the same with people going from Canada to another country. On page 1, the letter reads:

At the initiative of the British side, discussions of officials concerning a possible reciprocal social security agreement between the United Kingdom and Canada were held between 1969 and 1972.

This was under a Liberal government. On page 2 we read:

The first discussions with another country in this respect were held among officials in London in July, 1977.

What happened in the 1969 to 1972 meetings? They were at the initiative of the British side. This government would like the people of Canada to believe that Britain is at fault in this. Britain had two offers on the table between 1969 and 1972. First, that future increases in rate would be paid to beneficiaries of British pensions in Canada. Second, they required unconditional export of Canadian old-age security pensions. So the British in 1972 were willing to conclude this kind of a treaty and the Canadians who were representing us at that time were not. However, in this letter there was rather a curious remark which I noted because I have quarrelled with the minister about it. The minister said:

On two separate occasions (June 1977 and December 1978), the Prime Minister of Canada drew the attention of his British colleague to this issue.

In the minutes of the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs on November 7, 1978, the same minister was explaining to me why the British were not going to be treated the same as the Italians when they had a kind of media event in Toronto when the reciprocal pension agreement was signed with Italy. At that time the minister said:

On the British one, I am investigating the possibility of reciprocity of pension but the Brits really are not helping at all. I hope this will be put on the agenda of our two Prime Ministers if they meet very soon, which is what we heard in the press yesterday. As soon as I know whether it is to be on the agenda or not I will inform the House and that will, of course, change completely and speed up. I hope, my course of action. That is my priority.

The moment required the priority, but the priority immediately disappeared as soon as the committee ended, I suppose, because we never heard any more about the Prime Minister meeting with the Prime Minister of Britain and discussing this matter at all. Now the minister, without any effort, tells me the door is shut forever and to forget about it. But you cannot forget about it because the people who need it are still there.

I would like to say a word about this difficulty we have with the widow's pension, spouse's allowance, and so on. If we are going to continue the inflationary policies of this government, which we seem likely to do, we have to begin considering that that inflationary cycle will go on and on. We have to make arrangements so that our senior citizens can live in some type of style and dignity. I suggest we look at what other countries are doing.