

Our committee heard from the aged, nurses' unions, the teachers' federation, the Royal Canadian Legion, the governments of five provinces and that of the Yukon Territory. Others wrote letters. This is something that concerns the people of Canada. I regret that the Leader of the Government in the Senate is not in the chamber. However, let me assist him and his party to pull themselves up by the bootstraps for once in their lives and try to get a little higher in the polls by taking, for once, the advice of the Senate.

**Senator Roblin:** Honourable senators, I had made a promise to myself not to intervene in this debate, because I was not one of those who was actually involved in the studies that produced the Senate report that results in the amendments that we are making to this bill. I had not intended to break that promise to myself until I heard the last speaker. There is something that I must have missed in this whole proceeding. I understood that the main thrust of the amendments, or the desire of the members of the opposition, is to protect people that they describe as the poor and the sick, those who deserve our compassion and our attention. That, surely, is a commendable exercise.

● (1320)

Honourable senators, I am not certain that this bill, as it was originally proposed to us, is a perfect piece of legislation. I suspect that it is not. I suspect that it is susceptible to improvement and to change, which we might, perhaps, suggest. But when I compare what we are now doing with our stated objective, I cannot reconcile the two. We are told that we are to accept the amendments to this bill, because they will save money for those who need our help. We heard about that particularly in the statement made by the previous speaker. Yet, what are we doing? The first thing that we are doing is that we are raising the levy from 4 per cent to 14 per cent. Surely that is bound to raise the price of generic drugs, and that will be reflected, I am sure, in the pocketbooks of all those people who buy generic drugs. So much of the drug bill is paid for through the various provincial medical plans, but not all of it. Certainly someone will have to pay the bill. It will either be the taxpayer indirectly or those who are consuming the generic drugs.

So we can see that there is a price increase there. We are now told, "That's all right, because it is going to go into research." Well, I do not object to that too much. And who is going to do the research? Well, no doubt these multinational companies of which we think so poorly will be doing the research, or most of it. We do not like them, but we are going to give them a little money anyway—but not very much, I suggest; and I rather doubt whether this 10 per cent increase in the price of generic drugs will induce the kind of research that we really want to see in Canada and for the welfare, primarily, of our people. I do not think that is likely to come about. If it does, I will certainly be glad of it.

We have this situation that the first step that the Senate is taking to relieve the poor is to increase the price of generic drugs. To me that does not make much sense. There are other

ways of raising the money, and it was suggested in the original Bill C-22, but it is not in this amendment.

When I get back to Winnipeg, I am supposed to tell my people what I have been doing for them. I suppose I will have to go out and say, "Well, I was in the Senate and we have decided to protect you from the machinations of the multinational corporations, most of whom are Americans, about whom we are not very enthusiastic; we are going to save you from their power to increase drug prices, and the way we are going to do it is by raising the price of generic drugs to you by 10 per cent and hand that money over to them." That is going to be a hard argument for me to make.

But there is more to come, and it is worse. One of the other things that we tried to do in the original Bill C-22 was to protect the public against all kinds of unjustified drug price increases, both in the generic and patent drugs. There was a prices review board in there that was designed to do that job. It would control at two levels: first, as I understand it, at the introductory level—when new drugs are brought in, they would be subject to their examination; and then any price increases that were proposed for any kind of drug would also be subject to that prices review board.

When I heard Senator LeBlanc from New Brunswick speak this morning and tell us that the fact that we had been accustomed to having some kind of control over medical costs constituted a distinctly Canadian feature—and I suppose it is—I had to gather that he did not understand that the amendments were abolishing the drug price control. Because we were relying on competition, we would not need this kind of protection. So, we are abolishing the drug price control board. Why? Because competition would do the job for us.

Let us look at that rather seductive idea for a minute or two. Competition in what area? Competition in generic drugs, of course. But what proportion of the drugs that are sold, particularly the high-priced drugs, are generic? Very little. Most of the high-priced drugs are patent drugs, and we have deprived ourselves in this bill of any means of controlling the increasing price of patent drugs that are now to be set, presumably, at the will of those monopolists of whom we are so critical.

**Senator Frith:** Not after four years.

**Senator Roblin:** Senator Frith says, "not after four years;" but the point is that that is the way the bill is structured—and why we would remove this prices control board, no matter whether it is four years or 44 years, escapes me. There is some missing link—

**Senator Frith:** Because competition will protect us.

**Senator Roblin:** If competition will protect us, then why is it not protecting us now? That is what I would like to know. If you take the competition with patent drugs, most of them do not get to be made generic drugs. Where is the competition there? Most of them do not get to be made generic drugs.

● (1330)

**Senator Frith:** They are subject to compulsory licensing.