

power of the universal and unconditional pension to its level of 21 years ago.

No one would support the view that we should have dealt with those who do not receive the guaranteed income supplement while neglecting the need to improve the pension of GIS recipients. But that is not what is proposed. The increase to the one group is of the same order as the increase to the other group. The existing relationships between the two groups is being maintained, not narrowed. Indeed, the legislation provides that this relationship will be maintained automatically in perpetuity.

We have been concerned—necessarily concerned, as I have said—with the plight of the poor. But what of the near poor? A single pensioner with a private annual income of \$1,700 is not entitled to the guaranteed income supplement. Is this person so well provided for that he is none of our concern? We have been arbitrary, as we must be, in identifying that amount of income which reduces a pensioner's guaranteed income supplement to zero. But is the person just below that line a poor person, and the person just above that line not poor, by virtue of the line we have drawn?

I know many of the near poor whose other income, although pitifully small and secured by caution, thrift and rigorous self-denial over many years, allows them to live a precarious and extremely simple existence when it is combined with their old age pension. I make no apology for supporting legislation which remembers the near poor along with the poor and reaffirms the original intent of this legislation to recognize the contribution of all the senior citizens of this wonderful and very wealthy country which we inherit from them.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be a member of the government which introduced this legislation—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whicher:—but even more important, I am proud to be a citizen of Canada, a country that is giving more to its senior citizens than any other country in the whole world.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Douglas Roche (Edmonton-Strathcona): Mr. Speaker, as you know, I am a new member of this House of Commons. Before coming here I used to wonder why it took so long to have debate in the House and to pass legislation. Tonight we have a good example of why we are extending the time of the House of Commons when it does not need to be extended.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Roche: We have an example here, Mr. Speaker, of a debate that did not need to take place. I believe that the country could live without the words that I am going to offer in comment on this bill. We are having this debate because the government, with the free and easy compliance of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), has chosen to extend it before going into committee.

Old Age Security Act

I have a few comments to make about the bill. I address them through you, Sir, to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde). He brought in the bill and suggested two or three times in his speech that it was indeed a very fine thing that the government was doing. He said this was the largest single increase ever brought in, and there was the suggestion in his speech that we should be happy with what the government is doing.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that along with my colleagues I shall vote for this bill, but we do not do so with any happiness because we consider it is a reflection of political cynicism; it is the result of an election which has made the government dependent upon the New Democratic Party for support; it is placating the New Democratic Party. I may say to the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre that for many years I sat in the gallery and watched him and indeed admired him for the forthright manner of his speech in pleading causes. But he was too easily satisfied tonight.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Roche: Mr. Speaker, I will tell you why there is unhappiness in our party, why there is unhappiness throughout the country at the news that the pension, with the increase, will amount to only \$100. Why did 1,500 senior citizens assemble at Queen's Park yesterday to ask for an increase? Because the federal increase to \$100 is not enough. Why did Mayor Dent of Edmonton have the Mayor's Committee of Senior Citizens launch a petition to have the people of Edmonton give an expression of their views as to the validity of this increase? Mr. Speaker, 17,000 people in Edmonton have so far signed this petition, pleading with the federal government to increase the old age pension to at least a minimum of \$125.

This committee was in existence during the past two months; it preceded the minister's introduction of this bill and it preceded the introduction of the budget when the figure of \$100 was announced. Half of the 17,000 people signed the petition before the \$100 figure was known, and the other half signed after the budget was introduced on February 19. The petition is still being signed and will be brought here upon completion. It indicates that many people in Edmonton are unhappy with what has been done.

Why, Mr. Speaker, did the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens Federation come to Parliament Hill today and speak to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs to ask if it could exert its influence for a much better deal for the senior citizens of this country? They are going to make the same request tomorrow to the government. All this has happened since the \$100 figure was announced.

Why have I received a telegram from the president of Pensioners Concerned in Edmonton, Mrs. Kay Charest, who expresses her appreciation for the increase that has been put through but says she realizes that by April inflation will have eroded practically all the benefits, and strongly urges price control, especially for rent and food, and that the old age security and guaranteed income supplement be tied to the cost of living?

Why, Mr. Speaker, did the Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired in Edmonton, Alberta, send me a message