

Old Age Security Act Amendment

The hon. member was obviously confusing the amendment before us with an amendment during second reading stage of a bill. Apparently he forgot we are now at the third reading stage, or he does not realize there is a difference between a vote in the committee of the whole and a vote in this house. I do not profess to be a procedural expert, but I have been around long enough to understand perfectly well what the purpose of this amendment is. I have listened to the hon. member for Medicine Hat at times when I thought he did know something about the rules, and I am sure he understands perfectly well the purpose of this amendment.

Mr. Olson: Would the hon. member permit a question? Can he tell us whether he understands perfectly well what the effect of this amendment will be?

Mr. Barnett: That is exactly the point I had in mind. The effect of the passage of this amendment, and perhaps it would pass if the hon. member for Medicine Hat would vote for it, would be to force the government when we return to committee of the whole to take some action in accordance with the terms of the amendment.

Mr. Olson: Has that ever happened in this house?

Mr. Barnett: Perhaps not, but it could happen a first time, and it would be more likely to happen during this parliament than any other of which I have been a member. In falling back on this narrow procedural argument the hon. member for Medicine Hat and his colleagues are passing up a great opportunity to do a real service to the senior citizens of Canada. The passage of this amendment would place before the government a clear choice. Either get off the treasury benches and let someone occupy them who can bring in good legislation or vote for the amendment, go back into committee of the whole and immediately bring in a proper amendment to the bill according to the wish expressed by this house.

The proposition put forward by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is simple and clearcut, and I am sure the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pickersgill) understands it even though the hon. member for Medicine Hat may not. I really do not want to take up too much time in respect to the procedural argument because I think what is involved in the substance of the amendment is much more important.

[Mr. Barnett.]

In reference to what the government has proposed let me say that I felt that the minister's speech was one of the most pitiful spectacles I have seen in this house. The minister, understandably goaded by some of the discussion which took place in the committee, admittedly fairly extensive, made a reply during the third reading stage in respect of the amendment now before us. As he continued he slowly fired his own imagination with his own eloquence. He must have sensed that his colleagues sitting behind him needed some kind of lift as a result of the statement made by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Sharp) last night. In response to the urge to create an element of enthusiasm within his own party he went on and on and referred to remarks by the hon. members for Burnaby-Coquitlam (Mr. Douglas) and York South (Mr. Lewis) in another debate in an attempt to suggest there were inconsistencies between those remarks and the proposition put forward by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre in this amendment.

When the minister came to the conclusion of his statement we heard a round of applause from backbenchers on the government side such as we have not heard for a long time. When the applause subsided the minister was reduced to the confusion of a trembling jellyfish by one question. If I recall correctly the question was posed by the hon. member for Winnipeg South (Mr. Sherman). That hon. member suggested that as the minister's speech progressed it had become more and more apparent there was an inconsistency in his argument. His question was whether the minister by arguing in the way he did was introducing legislation to abolish the present \$75 old age security pension. That was the only logic to the minister's speech.

Far from accusing the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre of being inconsistent and not being able to get beyond the ideas of the 1951 committee, the minister ought to take a quick look at the logic of his own point of view. Perhaps one of these days we will reach a stage of development in this country through technology and technocracy where we can have a guaranteed basic income for all citizens of our community which will make irrelevant questions regarding basic and minimum levels of income for senior citizens. That time has not arrived, and probably it will not arrive with the kind of government we now have.

● (10:50 p.m.)

It is complete and utter nonsense for the Minister of National Health and Welfare to