

rather than whether or not we are dealing with a six and five or a seven and six, and so on, which seems to be what we are talking about most of the time.

Mr. Hovdebo: Are you going to vote against this Bill?

Mr. McRae: I believe that we as Canadians have a sound program. There are areas in which I would like to see more done. I would like to see universality of the portability of our pension programs expanded. That will be another debate that will occur here in the next few months. I think much more can be done by the Government than has been done to provide Canadians with a decent retirement income, an income on which they can depend.

In closing, I have to say I do not fear these Bills, partly because they are in the name of universality—we have made sure they are for everyone—and partly because I do not think Canadians are going to suffer from any of these Bills simply because inflation is coming down. In the meantime, I think it is important that we all get out and support the kinds of programs we have in place, improve them—there is no question they can be improved—and maintain the notion of universality. Let us not hack away at these Bills.

Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Mr. Speaker, will the Hon. Member who has just spoken entertain a question?

Mr. McRae: Certainly, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Mr. Speaker, how can one expand universality without going into the galactic and cosmic? I thought universality was all-embracing. Perhaps the Hon. Member could explain.

Mr. McRae: Sorry, I missed a word, Mr. Speaker. I heard the word "galactic" and then a word disappeared.

Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): It was cosmic.

Mr. McRae: This is a semantic question. I assume universality means that in general a program is available to everyone, regardless of income. There are several programs of that kind in existence on which I depend. We also move away from universality, I admit, when we put out a guaranteed income supplement. I deplore that. To what extent? How does one get enough money to do all of these things? Therefore, there are some people who need more support and we have to do it that way. But still, I do not think there is any reason why we should abandon universality in the kind of programs we are talking about. For instance, I support the Child Tax Credit because essentially that is money going to very low-income families. But I also support the notion that all families should receive the basic Family Allowance.

Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I rise with a certain amount of sadness to speak on this Bill to increase the number of people who will be below the poverty line. I would like to have given the pensioners of Canada a better gift than this just before Christmas.

Before I go into my remarks on the Bill, I want to follow up on the position taken by the Hon. Member for Thunder Bay-

Old Age Security Act (No. 2)

Atikokan (Mr. McRae). He spent a considerable amount of time on universality, which he says the Government supports. I maintain that the Government has eroded the universality idea in every approach it has made in the Bills the Government has put before the House through Bill C-131, Bill C-132 and Bill C-133. The Government has failed in all of these Bills. It has failed on possibly the most important subject of universality, namely the subject of medicare. The Government has done this by allowing doctors to bill separately. The Government has allowed the undermining of the universality of medicare. The Government has made it selective as well as universal.

In Bill C-132, the Family Allowances Bill, the Government has also eroded the basic principle of universality. The Government has said: "Okay, everyone will get the Family Allowance, but we will also put in a Child Tax Credit". The Government is reducing the amount of universal Family Allowance and increasing the amount of the Child Tax Credit. The Government is plunking down on universality and is for selectivity. That is the basis under which the Government is operating.

Third, we are talking about the old age pension. The Old Age Security Act is a universal program. In this Bill, the Government is undermining and eroding that principle. The Government is reducing the amount of the Old Age Security, which is the universal part of the program, and it is increasing the effectiveness of the Guaranteed Income Supplement. I am not entirely against this, but if you are going to do nothing, doing it selectively is better than nothing. However, the basis of universality is being eroded by this Government right now. It is part of every Bill this Government has put forward in its series of six and five Bills.

The Bill before us is the one which limits the indexation of old age pensions to 6 per cent in 1983 and 5 per cent in 1984. This is kind of an insidious Bill. The people being affected by it do not really know what is going to happen to them. The limitation does not start until January. We hope now it may even be February or March if we can keep the Government from passing it. Many seniors do not even realize that a cutback is coming. Seniors will still get their pension cheques, but unless they are very up to date, seniors will not know that they will not be getting as much as they should have been getting. The difference between the December cheque and the January cheque and the January and February cheque will be less than it should have been. If they were going to keep their purchasing power at the level it was in December, they should have been getting more.

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This Bill will reduce their incomes by close to \$300 over a two-year period. Unless the amendment is passed, which we will support while voting against the Bill, the base of the old age pension will be reduced from now on. Not only will those who only receive the old age pension have the base reduced, but those receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement as well