

● (1732)

I realize that over the years some members of the House have complained about the OAS and claim there should be a higher limit, but I do not agree. Certainly it would be appreciated by senior citizens, but I suspect that an amount added to the basic pension would go to people who do not require it. I am using the same principle as that in the legislation before the House now to ask if there is not something we can do in that area. Perhaps there is no concern about it, however. I believe there is, and I believe the principle could be transferred to the old age pensioner in order that those who have the greatest need derive the greatest benefit, and those who have the least need derive the minimum benefit.

I hope the Minister of National Health and Welfare, who is present, will see if some such plan can be introduced. Hon. members will know that there is no extra money for programs of this type; all we are doing in this legislation is redistributing some money. If my premise is correct and we do not have additional funds for social programs, then I suggest we look at redistribution so that money will go to the people with the greatest need, not only in family allowances but also to people receiving the old age pension.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by correcting something the hon. member for Comox-Alberni (Mr. Anderson) said. He said he wanted to apply the same principle to the old age pension legislation by making sure the OAS was not indexed. He said that would be the same principle as that in the family allowance bill. If he looks at the bill, however, he will see that we are not going to end indexing of the basic family allowance. Indexing will continue.

The hon. member for Lafontaine-Rosemont (Mr. Lachance), who is not in the House at the moment, was sensitive to the very just criticisms of the government made by the hon. member for Broadview (Mr. Rae) who spoke of the inequities in our economy and in our society. I think he misunderstood the position of the hon. member for Broadview who said we would support the bill, and that the position outlined by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) is the position of the party. The hon. member for Broadview pointed out that this legislation is only one small step toward remedying some of the inequities in our society.

I want to take a few minutes to talk about five or six different things this evening. This bill could be a major reform if a few things are cleared up. I agree with the minister that it could be a watershed in social policy in this country, but that will only happen if several points are clarified.

Like the hon. member for Broadview and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, I believe we have to be concerned about the redistribution of income and, indeed, I believe the minister is genuinely concerned about that, although I am not sure she was last night, judging from the speech she made. We have to realize, despite the statistics used by the hon. member

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for Gloucester (Mr. Breau) in the House the other day, that in the last 20 years the gap between rich and poor has not narrowed. The figures used in the House yesterday can be obtained from Statistics Canada. Perhaps some hon. members do not think that Statistics Canada, the little organization of the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Horner), is accurate, but I think it is.

The figures show that in 1951 the richest 20 per cent of our population received some 42.8 per cent of the national income, while in 1975 the wealthiest 20 per cent of our population received 43 per cent of the national income.

Mr. Breau: What about other income?

Mr. Nystrom: All right; let us take the bottom 20 per cent of the population. In 1951 they received 4.4 per cent of the national income, while in 1975 they received 4 per cent of the national income. The hon. member, who comes from New Brunswick, will probably say that everybody's income went up and, of course, it did. We are living in a country with immense resources, and all kinds of technology, and we hope, all kinds of intelligent people. Naturally the wealth of the country went up, but the gap between the rich and the poor is not narrowing as the Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Science and Technology (Mr. Buchanan) would have us believe. It has remained the same for 25 years.

Canadians are not out on the streets without any food, but there have been reports that a lot of Canadians are ill nourished and cannot afford to buy nutritious food. The problem of poverty in this country is well documented, so we have to be concerned about the redistribution of wealth. This is the point the hon. member for Broadview was making, and I want to put that on the record.

Mr. Breau: Be careful; we will read it.

Mr. Nystrom: I am being very careful about what I say.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, if we clarify two or three things this will be watershed legislation and a major change in the government's thinking on social programs. If that happens, I would join the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre in thanking the minister for introducing the bill.

I should like to deal with some positive parts of the bill, and then raise my questions, Mr. Speaker. On the question of redistribution of income, the bill does not only redistribute the money in the family allowance plan, but the pie is bigger. More money is being put in, and there is a genuine attempt to redistribute it. For example, there is the tax credit of \$200 per child. People earning under \$18,000 per year get the full benefit of that. People earning over \$26,000 do not get the benefit, as it is phased out between \$18,000 and \$26,000. That is the way it should be. Members of parliament earn more than \$26,000, for instance. I have a four-year old child and I do not think I deserve the tax credit. On the income I make I think I can afford to look after the child, and other people need it more than I do.