

lars, even in Canada, there are still some people who go to bed hungry and among them there are often old people.

The bill which is in third reading features three things. First, it provides a cost of living escalation clause. As a matter of fact, it is an excellent piece of legislation and I want to commend the minister for it.

For a long time, there have been requests for the escalation of social assistance rates based on the cost of living, since the first to suffer from inflation were the sick, the disabled, the war veterans and the elderly people who, moreover, were subjected to an income ceiling set by governments granting them pensions, which resulted into serious injustice.

That is why I welcome the provisions which are found in Bill C-207 for escalating old-age security pensions in line with the rise in the cost of living.

Where I do not agree is on the basic amounts granted and on the principle of the guaranteed income supplement.

• (1710)

In fact, a basic amount of \$82.88 will be granted to anyone aged 65. In order to receive more money, forms will have to be filled in and returned for the expert calculations of public servants who will establish what is the amount of the supplement, in accordance with the cost of living index. At any rate, the maximum amount to be granted after these lengthy and complicated calculations will be \$150 a month, including the amount based on the cost of living.

I do not know of any unmarried person who can live on \$150 a month in Canada. Out of \$150, \$60 a month must be deducted for housing which leaves only \$90 a month to the pensioner for food, clothing and drugs. They have to live 30 days on that. We know that older people are often in need of drugs which are very expensive.

Mr. Speaker, the bill now under consideration which would raise monthly pensions to \$150 for single persons and \$285 for married couples is not realistic. It does not take into account those who are victimized by the present economic situation. In fact, this light increase is not geared to the cost of living.

Everybody is aware of the fact, Mr. Speaker, that in Canada housing, clothing and food are the most expensive things. Now, these three items of our everyday life are precisely those which are first affected by inflation, by the increase in the cost of living. The moment we begin to feel the increase in the cost of living, we can see immediately the bad effects it has on rents, which older people are unable to control. These people are just like everybody else: they must live with the lease system and put up with rent hikes. Though old, they cannot go to the corner store, to the grocer's, and say: I do not want prices to go up. Being frozen at \$150 a month, their income is clearly insufficient and they are compelled to suffer the increase in the cost of living without any kind of protection.

The government will tell me that I am wrong, that under the legislation they will get an increment geared to the cost of living, but I shall answer right away that the proposed 3.6 per cent progressive boost based on the cost

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of living only applies to this maximum amount of \$150. This means that the increase in the cost of living is only taken into account for the total amount of \$150. Now then, with \$150, as I said earlier, a person cannot live decently in Canada. This does not even represent the bare minimum with which one person can have three square meals a day.

This is why I said at the beginning of my remarks that the government's philosophy in speeding up the passing of this bill—and I am not the least surprised about it—can only bring more misery and poverty in Canada, that it is nothing but a bandaid treatment which does not settle the problem at all and which can only maintain people in poverty because what they are granted under this legislation does not meet their requirements, at this time.

Mr. Speaker, since 1962, we have been calling for this escalation in old age security pensions according to the increase in the cost of living. This is the first principle that we support. Secondly, we suggest that the basic amount of old age security pensions should be equal to the minimum income that a person requires to live decently. We are urging that senior citizens be granted a basic amount equivalent to the minimum income that a person must have in order to live decently and cope with the rising cost of living.

This is why we have moved amendments at the report stage to improve the bill, to change its intent, its philosophy, to get us out once for all out of this mesh that generates poverty and social inequalities. Is it any wonder that after 10 years, in spite of the billions of dollars invested in social security, social inequalities are still with us? Is it any wonder that poverty continues to exist in a country as rich as ours?

Mr. Speaker, it is significant because pensions are inadequate and do not take into account the minimum a person requires in order to live decently. As a result, people get no help, but only crumbs with which they manage to keep body and soul together. It is unfortunate, and we find it shocking, considering the tremendous wealth of our country, that all Canadians should be the victims of the financial system that controls everything.

Mr. Speaker, we are asking, in plain words, so that the other side will understand, that the old age security pension—and this was the purpose of the amendments we moved—be statutorily available to people at 60 instead of 65. Why? Simply because, on account of what is going on in our ridings, a person of 60 who has the bad luck of losing his job—a fact which accounts for economic insecurity in Canada—has a very hard time finding another job, some proper means of living. Actually, it is impossible.

A Canadian age 60, Mr. Speaker, is almost incapable of finding a job. Now, a person who loses his job through illness—and it is a known fact that that illness strikes more often at that age—has no chance of finding another decent job. This means that no help is available and that he must rely solely on himself for his livelihood, in order to meet his needs and obligations, with the result that he must manage to survive for five years, from 60 to 65, with the hope of living until then and getting the old age security pension at 65, as provided in the bill.