

Senior Citizens

in January close to 1.3 million senior citizens received the supplement and officials say about half the recipients are so poor they qualify for 80 per cent or more of the maximum supplement. The number of people receiving spouse's allowance was nearly 88,000 in January of this year. Even the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) has said that the plight of the elderly poor is particularly severe because they are mostly unable to get extra cash from full- or part-time jobs. So the problem is indeed serious and it bears further examination by Members of this House. If it was referred to a committee we would have a better opportunity to do so.

Another area which I was not really familiar with, and perhaps I should have been, is that studies coming out of some other jurisdictions show that there is an increase in the incidence of violence against elderly people. In fact, I believe that a study done by the Department of National Health and Welfare warned this violence was increasing. There is also an increasing incidence of suicide of people over the age 65. That is not some alarmist statement coming from a Member of the NDP or the Official Opposition; these are statistics produced by the Department of National Health and Welfare. That is something we should be concerned about.

One of the figures I saw was that it was predicted that the incidence of violence against elderly Canadians and awareness of it is probably at about the same stage as violence against children was ten years ago. I know of a case in my own riding which concerned not only violence. It involved an elderly person who, because of age, has become forgetful and whose attention span was not what it used to be. She became easily confused by everything that was going on around her. An individual in an elected position—no doubt in my view in an attempt to assist this lady and ensure that no one took advantage of her—ended up acting as a trustee for her bank account. Unfortunately, this woman ended up leaving the amount in her bank account to this person who was acting as a trustee.

Now, I am not suggesting any bad motives on the part of the individual involved, at least initially, but the point is that when that happened, and it received wide attention in the press, other members of my community came to me and told me about similar cases on their own street where neighbours were going into elderly persons' houses to see how they were and were walking away with half the house.

I know of another case just around the corner from where I live in my constituency where there is no question but that a real estate agent convinced this woman, who was 72 or 73, to sell the house to him. This was only about three years ago. The houses in my area cost anywhere between \$80,000 to \$120,000. He convinced this woman to sell the house to him for \$10,000 and he would allow her to live at a relatively low rent in the second half of the house.

That happens I think more frequently than it comes to our attention as Members of Parliament. It is shameful, Mr. Speaker. But what it shows, I think very clearly on the part of society generally, is that first of all there is an attitudinal problem towards elderly people. When you become age 65 you

are no longer considered to be a productive member of society so you are shunted away and forgotten about. No one pays any attention to you or what happens to you or even cares about what happens to you. I think that is how these incidents arise; no one pays any special attention to the elderly person who is living on their own. Society is changing so rapidly that very often people, without thinking about it too much, I suppose, become so concerned about surviving on a personal basis that they forget about people in society who are no longer able to care for themselves.

I tell you, Mr. Speaker, that at the United Nations Assembly on Aging, the difference in attitude between the so-called developed countries and the so-called Third World underdeveloped countries towards elderly people is like night and day. People in the Third World can show us an awful lot of things about how we should treat elderly people. People in Third World countries view the elderly as being rich in experience and wisdom with a valuable contribution to make to society, particularly to the children. It is only now, through some private projects in this country, that we are beginning to realize that when people reach age 65, rather than being dumped they should be encouraged to make a contribution to the community and to society as a whole. In the Niagara Peninsula through an excellent project, elderly citizens are encouraged to participate in the community with daycare and that sort of thing, and this has been very successful.

● (1620)

I could go on, Mr. Speaker, but I do not want to appear to be helping to talk out the Bill. I think it is too important to society generally, not just elderly people, that we take a hard look at what we want to do to assist seniors to continue to participate in the mainstream of Canadian life.

Mr. Stan Darling (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, I would certainly be pleased to make a few comments on this Bill but, like my colleague the Hon. Member for York-Sunbury (Mr. Howie) and the Hon. Member for Beaches (Mr. Young), I want it to go to Committee. I wonder how much time is left before the hour is up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): I should inform the Hon. Member that the debate began at 3:30 p.m. so we have approximately eight minutes left.

Mr. Darling: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not want to be the one who is accused of talking out the Bill.

I should like to commend the Hon. Member for York-Sunbury for outlining in detail many of the problems that face senior citizens. I suppose that in order not to get into trouble I should declare a conflict of interest immediately. I am a senior citizen myself and, I think, one who is reasonably active.

I share the concern of Hon. Members for senior citizens, some of whom find it difficult to get along financially and others who are not treated as well as they should be. It is probable that a good many of the latter live in the more heavily populated areas of the country. In the smaller towns