

Old Age Security Act Amendment

I wish the minister at this time could undergo the transformation which changed Scrooge into Santa Claus. It is not too late for that. He would be proud if he did that, and his descendants to the nth generation would be proud that he had the courage to do this.

Perhaps I should not say that. I do not know what his status is at the moment. Perhaps I can remind him of another occasion when my father looked across at the then prime minister and said that the prime minister's descendants would be exceedingly proud to know what he had done for Canada. My father was also forgetful of the prime minister's marital status.

I want to touch on a point raised by the speaker who preceded me on the government side. He said we objected to the tribunal. We object to the use that will be made of this tribunal. In the past, the tribunal has been used to establish age, and the right of recipients to receive benefits. In future, the tribunal will go into the means of the elderly people, and that will be very sad for those old people who are called before the tribunal when their statement of income is questioned.

I wish to raise another point about this legislation. To the best of my knowledge—and I wish the minister would let me know if I am wrong—the government has made no arrangements with the provinces to make sure that when this legislation is passed the provinces will not curtail or withdraw the provincial supplement to the old age security payment. So far as I am aware, no such arrangements have been made between the minister and the provincial governments to protect the old people of this country. I think I am right because when I tried to get an assurance the other day from the premier of British Columbia that there would be no curtailing or withdrawing of the provincial supplement when this legislation was passed, which in our province goes up to \$30, I learned that the premier was not talking yet.

Of course, in British Columbia we have a built in guarantee, because we have an opposition there that is strong enough to prevent the government from escaping its obligations.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

An hon. Member: An opposition?

Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): Do not laugh. We have an opposition strong enough to prevent the government from withdrawing the provincial supplement. That is the type of opposition we have there.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): Do not laugh too soon because you might make another mistake.

● (5:20 p.m.)

I must say this: until the minister has received an assurance from the provincial governments that they intend to pay the present income supplement to old age pensioners once this legislation becomes effective, I do not think this bill should be passed. I do not think it should be passed until there is some guarantee from the provinces that the supplementary allowances will be paid as before.

In British Columbia there are a great many old age pensioners in all our ridings. Many of them are very much worried that when this legislation is passed they will lose something which the province has been giving them. They have done their best, by following newspaper articles and statements made in this house, to cut through the jungle of administrative detail which is now contained in the bill and which will, I suspect, be contained in the regulations when they are approved. The complexities will remain in spite of the booklet of explanation which the minister has promised. We have not as yet received sufficient assurance from the minister that these people will not be deprived of the provincial supplements they are now getting, once this federal legislation comes into effect.

I have received a letter from one pensioner who is very much concerned. Her income does not fall within the lowest category. She lives in my riding, and she writes:

I am 78 years old—a widow. I have my own little home. Sometimes I wish I hadn't, because I cannot get into one of our senior citizens' homes as I have too much money. I have no money, though, only my home which is worth about \$7,000 or \$8,000. Our provincial government gives me \$30, and that makes \$105 a month in all. It takes that \$30 and more to run my little four roomed home with oil, gas, light and 'phone. Now they tell me I will not get any raise in my pension. We have paid taxes here since 1910 and it seems that the people who own their own homes are the worst off.

We receive letters of this kind all the time. These people are worried and upset. I want to know, and this party wants to know, what arrangements the minister proposes to make with the provincial governments to ensure that once this legislation becomes effective the latter will maintain the supplements to the old age pension they are presently granting?

We feel the old people are being made pawns in the power play between the provinces and the federal government. We think this sort of thing should stop. We do not feel