

Old Age Security Act Amendment

Mr. Pickersgill: Speaking subject to correction, I think clause 1 is the short title, is it not?

Mr. Knowles: Before the minister gets into an embarrassing situation let me say that clause 1 is not the short title.

Mr. Pickersgill: I beg your pardon.

Mr. Knowles: Clause 1 seems—

Mr. Pickersgill: I accept the hon. gentleman's statement. I have made a fool of myself. I accept that.

An hon. Member: That is normal.

Mr. Knowles: I can only be magnanimous and accept the minister's remark.

I address myself to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. Does he wish to make his remarks now on the question he omitted covering when he closed the debate on second reading?

Mr. MacEachen: We are now in committee and it will be possible for me on clause 9 to deal with the provincial supplements which I was urged to deal with earlier in reply to questions by the opposition. As hon. members know, the guillotine was applied.

Mr. Knowles: If the minister does not wish to have the floor, perhaps I might retain it for a few minutes.

I have already said that this clause provides for a new section 2 in the Old Age Security Act. The clause sets out a number of definitions. One of the definitions tells us what a pension is to be and another tells us what a supplement is to be. I submit that in that distinction we have the very heart of this bill in that it provides for a \$75 flat rate pension to be paid to everyone who reaches pensionable age and it provides a supplement to some of these people if they meet conditions set out later in the bill.

It is interesting to see how concerned the Minister of National Health and Welfare is about the views of the members of the New Democratic Party and about some of the things we have been saying. He made a remark a few moments ago that the old age pensioners of Canada could not be but disturbed by reports reaching them of some of the things said in this house by members of this group. I have to tell him that his own speeches get much better publicity throughout this country than ours do and the clippings of those speeches which have been coming to me

[Mr. Knowles.]

by the dozen in the last two or three days suggest that the pensioners of Canada are disturbed by what he has said and are not disturbed by reports of what we have said. They are disturbed over the fundamental fact of this legislation, that from now on many old age pensioners will not get the full amount of the pension as of right.

I want to say right at the start of the clause by clause consideration of the bill that I object to the distinction set out in clause 1 between the pension and the supplement. As I say, this brings us to the whole point, that for one portion, the pension, no income test is required but for the supplement an income test is required.

The minister has tried to say, as have others on that side of the house during the course of the second reading debate, that we do not seem to understand the difference between a means test and a needs test or the difference between a means test and an income test. Let me assure the minister that we understand the differences among these three kinds of tests. We have stated—I made this clear myself—that we recognize that the income test under this legislation is much less severe than means tests as we have known them in the past or as they exist in other legislation at the present time. Our problem is not that we do not understand the differences among the various kinds of tests. The fact is that we do not like this income test. We do not like the test written into the act by Bill No. C-251 which robs the old age security pension of the universality it has had since January 1, 1952.

● (7:30 p.m.)

The minister tries to make a great deal of the fact that because we stand by the principles laid down in 1950 in the report of the joint committee on old age security, we are somehow venerating that document and giving it the respect paid to the laws of the Medes and Persians. He tried to tell us that his government was bringing in something new. I suppose this could become an argument in semantics, but as we see it the fundamental principle of the 1950 report, arrived at after many years of discussion in this house, was a good one. In the main it was a declaration that when people reach old age in this country there should not be any means or income test applied to their eligibility for pension. When the government now introduces a test with respect to part of that pension it is not coming in with something new; it is coming in with