

● (1640)

I have long awaited the time when there would be the kind of exchange that we have seen in the House today. In the past year and a half, not only have we been able to ask questions and give responses and comments following major presentations of 20 minutes or 40 minutes, a practice which I think enhances debate, but we now have an example of back-benchers being able and prepared to tell us what they really believe about an issue.

I give the Hon. Member for Cape Breton-East Richmond full marks for having had the courage and the conviction to say what he believed should be said regarding a Bill that was handicapping some of the citizens in his riding as well as citizens in all ridings across Canada. I look forward to the time when there will be more debates like this, and I submit that if we had more debates of this nature and if back-benchers felt that they could say what they should say more often, we would have a much better attendance here in the House. People would be interested in hearing what others had to say if they thought that the others were speaking from their hearts, the way the Hon. Member for Cape Breton-East Richmond just spoke.

I would like to point out that I would not be standing in the House of Commons this afternoon if it were not for the stubbornness and obstinacy of either the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) or her colleague, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde). Many Hon. Members of the House, including the Hon. Member who just spoke, have brought to their attention the fact that there is a real problem with Bill C-139 as it affects old age pensioners who receive GIS.

Today we are debating Bill C-40, a Bill which, according to the Minister responsible, is intended to be of assistance to about 25,000 potential GIS recipients. However, this morning she forgot to tell us that a few months ago when Bill C-139 was before the House, benefits were taken away to a greater or lesser extent from another 25,000 GIS recipients. That is what the Hon. Member for Cape Breton-East Richmond was talking about and that is the matter to which I would like to devote my few minutes this afternoon.

My colleague, the Hon. Member for Provencher (Mr. Epp), who is the Party health critic, and my colleague, the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald), have both explained very well and in some detail our concerns with regard to Bill C-40. As we have all acknowledged, all of us in the House are favourably disposed to this Bill itself. There is nothing particularly wrong with it, although some small points could be improved upon. However, we feel that as a substantive piece of legislation on pensions, this Bill is inadequate. Any criticism we have is directed to the inadequacy of this Bill and not because of a desire on our part to hold up the Bill. As the Hon. Member for Provencher has indicated, we had intended to see this Bill put through second reading this afternoon.

When I was listening to the debate this morning, I was very pleased to hear the Hon. Member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor)

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rise and speak in no uncertain terms about the problem as he saw it with Bill C-40 and its attempt to help GIS recipients. He mentioned that the Government that brought in Bill C-40 is the same Government that harmed another 25,000 people through Bill C-139 a few months ago.

The Hon. Member for Beaches (Mr. Young) touched upon the matter of the adverse effect of taking into account workers' compensation benefits on certain GIS recipients. As well, the Hon. Member for Beaches looked at the issue from the point of view of the work of the Committee on the Disabled and the Handicapped which met for three years and reported by way of a document entitled "Obstacles". As he said this morning, we received a fairly sympathetic hearing from the Government, which agreed with the committee's feeling that there is room for a great deal of help for the disabled and the handicapped people of the country. The Government appeared to be sympathetic, and then, a few months later, it turned around and came up with Bill C-139, which took away benefits from those same handicapped people. Now, three and a half months after the Government told us it was going to do it, it is bringing in this simple piece of legislation, which offers some benefits to those single pensioners who are in need of extra help by way of GIS.

There is a feeling among Members of all three Parties that there is a deficiency in this Bill because of the way in which it fails to coincide with Bill C-139. As the Hon. Member for Cape Breton-East Richmond suggested, I too would hope that when we get to committee on this Bill, we could prevail upon the Minister of National Health and Welfare to deal with this deficiency.

I suspect that it was not the fault of the Minister of National Health and Welfare that appropriate changes were not made earlier. I suspect that it was the fault of her colleague, the Minister of Finance, who does not seem to understand the difference between a compensation benefit that is paid to a worker who has been injured and remuneration for services rendered. This difference was well explained by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Bow River, this morning and again this afternoon.

I listened very carefully to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. MacLellan) who spoke a few moments ago, and I believe that he spoke very well. I have come to respect that Hon. Member because he and I were the parliamentary representatives of a recent delegation to the World Health Organization in Geneva. We got to know each other better at that time and I have a great deal of respect for him. For the benefit of those who might not be aware of it, WHO is the World Health Organization, an organization which holds an annual assembly in Geneva which is attended by representatives from some 150 countries who discuss issues of health care that are of general interest to all represented countries.

While at that assembly, the Parliamentary Secretary and I got to know each other to the point where I think we gained mutual respect. As the Hon. Member for Provencher said a few moments ago, he is an honourable Member and a sincere