

stances, the spouse under 65 and who is needy must apply for social welfare administered by the provinces, while the other spouse over 65 years of age receives old age security and the guaranteed income supplement from the federal government.

As I said during consideration in committee, the purpose of the bill is to ensure that in the future, at least for individuals over 60, no couple will have to provide for their needs solely on one pension. From now on, the couple will be considered as eligible for the guaranteed income supplement and the old age security pension for the spouse over 65 while the other will receive what we have called the spouse's allowance which will be substantially equivalent to what that person would be entitled to if both were over 65.

As I said, we are therefore seeking to remedy the situation which is now causing great hardship to such couples. Second, we aim at rationalizing the social security administration in Canada today. This in fact is part of efforts we have been making for two years to improve the social security systems in Canada. Indeed, as I said earlier, we are now in a situation where one spouse is relying on the federal system while the other must depend on the provincial system, even if the federal government pays 50 per cent of the provincial expenditures. It is therefore the opinion of the government that it would be advantageous to rationalize our administration so that the couple in that situation could deal with only one administration; at the same time, in most cases, that couple should qualify for higher benefits than those to which it is now entitled, even when combining provincial and federal allowances.

Some members of the House, some members of the committee suggested a much greater extension of the provisions of the act. For instance, that all single persons as well as all widows and widowers in need should be included. In short, what those members were proposing was the extension of the old age security or at least the guaranteed income supplement to all Canadians 60 years of age and over. The government's answer to that question is clear. Once again, the purpose of the bill is to solve the problem of couples where one spouse is more than 65 years old and the other, between 60 and 64. The purpose of the bill is not to apply the guaranteed income supplement to all persons from 60 to 64 years of age.

The government's position is that a guaranteed income supplement system must be established. The government supports a form of guaranteed income which must not, however, apply only to a limited group, to an age group, but to all persons in need, whatever their age, the specific situation in which they are, which means in practice, the establishment of a guaranteed income system in two parts, one of which would provide for an income support system for all persons who are unable to work or secure employment for lack of a suitable job within a reasonable distance from their places of residence, and on the other hand, an income supplement scheme to help underprivileged workers continue to earn a living, while making sure that these workers are never in a situation where they would get more as income support or social welfare recipients than as regular workers.

This is the policy we have been discussing with the provinces for the past two years or so, and as I mentioned

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in committee, the government has proposed introducing as early as next year the income support scheme and, some time later, the income supplement plan. A number of provinces have asked for time to examine this issue further. There will be other meetings, but I want to assure the House and the opposition that the government is fully involved in streamlining social welfare programs, and setting up a universal guaranteed income plan for all Canadians, not simply for only a small group of them.

The purpose of this legislation therefore is neither to cover all persons 60 to 64 years of age, nor to set up a full guaranteed income plan; it is only to meet a problem situation which has been critical for a great many Canadians.

In committee, we studied in detail all the aspects of this bill. I want to thank all the members for the consideration they were kind enough to give the provisions of the bill. In addition, as we know, this bill will do away with the Old Age Security Fund, which has become an anachronism in view of the many fiscal changes made in the last few years. The bill also gives the minister the authority to deal with cases requiring special attention, where the state made overpayments as a result of honest errors, and where reimbursement of those amounts would inflict hardships upon the aged concerned, or else where the cost of retrieving the money would exceed the amounts involved.

Those are the main provisions of the bill, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I want to thank the House for having kindly accepted to give consideration to this bill in so short a time.

Mr. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, on the occasion of the study of this bill, I should like to take a few minutes of the time of the House to express a few opinions. I listened to the minister very closely when he introduced the bill. I also had the pleasure of attending a committee meeting last night and hearing certain opinions and arguments.

I should like to say right off that, of course, our party agrees with the bill. There is no doubt about that. We feel that it is a step in the right direction when we speak of meeting the needs of a rather special group. We regret, however, that neither the widow nor the single person has been covered. The minister knows how we feel about that. Once again, of course, we have the minister's word for it, those categories will be helped out by the guaranteed annual income supplement.

I take this opportunity to point out, Mr. Speaker, that in seven years, I doubt that I have missed the opportunity of stressing the importance of the old age pension at 60. On the other hand, we are told that discussions with the provinces are under way and that eventually we can bank on a legislation that will cover almost all Canadians and guarantee everyone an adequate or a minimum revenue. But in the meantime, the fact is that in the existing social and economic context, some people wish to enjoy old age security at 60. Many factors prompt us to believe that it would be a quite interesting piece of legislation for today's society.

Since then, I think several representatives are increasingly aware of the policy designed to provide old age security at 60. The legislation before us is quite clear. The