

Old Age Security Act Amendment

should be expected to be prepared to follow through and accept the responsibility of voting against this legislation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, this type of behaviour cannot help but erode parliament's image. There is only one word to describe it and that word is "hypocrisy" or if you want a word more in keeping with the season and the tone of the opposition's epithets to me, that word is "humbug".

Hon. gentlemen have raised the "Dickens" in connection with this program and have attempted to give "Scrooge" a new currency. One is tempted to explore this area even further, and, if one does one must conclude that this house is fairly filled with Dickensian characters.

The 'umble and unctious Uriah Heep? He is reincarnated at least several times in the diagonally opposite corner to my right. When considering Mr. Gradgrind of Nicholas Nickleby, ladling out specious knowledge and soupy sustenance to his cringing charges, one does not have to look beyond the front benches of the official opposition to see where and how Mr. Gradgrind lives on. While the possibilities are limitless, I will not develop them further except to say this: one thing about Scrooge, pre-ghost and post-ghost, and he was a very unpleasant person, was that he had one outstanding quality. He was a person of conviction by word and by deed. Perhaps the N.D.P. might learn something from that characteristic.

At the end of my comments let me say that almost every speech made by members of the opposition has contained provocative and destructive statements about this measure with which I cannot agree. Let me remind the hon. member for Oshawa, who spoke earlier—

Mr. Starr: Ontario.

Mr. MacEachen: I was referring to the hon. member for Ontario (Mr. Starr) and I apologize for that mistake. It is my duty to reply to the criticisms which have been made in respect of this bill, but before we vote on the amendment to third reading of the bill let me say that we spent a whole day debating the resolution preceding the bill, four days on second reading and this is the fifth day on committee and third reading. We now have an amendment before us that the bill be sent back to committee for reconsideration. This bill has been considered fully in committee of the whole and its provisions have been studied

[Mr. MacEachen.]

thoroughly. The very purpose of this amendment has been fulfilled by discussion on amendments already proposed.

Last Friday the hon. member for Ontario suggested that we could complete the committee stage of the bill in half an hour or an hour. All I can say is that up to that time and since criticism has been levelled and every possible amendment has been moved. There could be no benefit from acceptance of this amendment to send the bill back for further study. It is time we came to a decision for the sake of Canada's old age pensioners. The house should know that for every additional day spent on this legislation our old age pensioners must wait another day for income support.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the minister a question. He referred to the proposal put forward by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre regarding the flat-rate increase. I gather from what he said that he feels such an increase would become inequitable for people in the higher income brackets rather than those in the lower income brackets. I am wondering where the inconsistency is between an approach to pensions on this level and an approach to pensions on the basic level. Do not the same mathematics and the same ethics apply to granting a pension on a universal basis on all levels?

● (9:40 p.m.)

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member has made a point. There is a consistency between establishing a floor, which the \$75 per month represents, as a matter of universal application, and further income support on the basis of income levels. I do not think they are necessarily inconsistent but I am not arguing that point strongly. I am suggesting that there is a difference in approach in deciding to spend a given sum of money among the whole income spectrum or deciding to weight it in respect of the lower income groups. This is the point I am making. I think they are different approaches.

Hon. E. D. Fulton (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker, it is perhaps fortunate that not very often one finds oneself in the position of having of necessity to discuss a measure of this importance and deal with such a partisan diatribe as the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. MacEachen) has just delivered.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.