

*Old Age Security*

to 65 years whose spouse is already aged 65 years or more, in order that he may now receive a pension. During this debate, it seems to me that the Minister of National Health and Welfare, if he can take a moment at the end of the debate, ought to answer these questions asked by thousands of Canadian men and women who are directly concerned. This question never ceases to crop up when we visit our constituencies and have the chance to talk to various classes of people. It is of concern to them and should, I think, bring a response from the government as soon as possible.

The sole reference which may be made to this operation's cost in millions of dollars is not, in my view a satisfactory answer. It is not because someone says: This will cost one, two or five millions more that this is an adequate solution to a human problem, especially when we know of the shameful waste in the spending of public funds and when we know that the wrong projections of this Minister of Finance, once adjusted, enable the government to make greater contributions from the Treasury without raising taxes for that. Millions of people are guided toward foreign aid and other activities in foreign countries so that the reports we receive allow us to think that it is quite possible those funds are not distributed as a businessman would. All that constitutes a record that I, for one, in any case, intend to look into in coming weeks to find out if those funds made available by the government of Canada and distributed by CIDA truly reach their destination and are truly used to help underdeveloped foreign countries in need of them.

If in reply to the requests voiced here for the 60 and 65 year olds reference is made to the concept of guaranteed minimum income or the objective of coherence in the field of social security, to be considered suitably, that concept will have to be further specified by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde). As a matter of fact I wonder—and that might be another question for the minister to answer—what has been done since the release of the yellow paper last spring on the question of guaranteed minimum income.

Surely, I hope the government will give us explanations on the subject because it is not a type of subject that should be saved only for an election campaign. That question could well be examined thoroughly and intelligently in this House and could well constitute a subject matter to be examined by the parliamentary committee.

In any case, Mr. Speaker, this bill pertains only to those 65 and over. In support in that regard of my colleagues of the Social Credit I ask the government in the expectancy of a guaranteed minimum income for all, to refer to the committee of the House that whole question of the 60 and 65 year olds. Is this financially possible? What are the true objections? What are the statistics concerning this? How can this be interpreted in the various areas of this country? What decisions should be taken and can the budget warrant such a decision?

● (1700)

It seems it would be in our interest to air the whole question in a committee of the House, using the information the government has and adding ours. Let that committee make its study without delay, a study leading

[Mr. Wagner.]

eventually to recommendations that could probably be referred to a federal-provincial conference on social security.

This bill, concerning people of 65 and over, is a step forward in that the increase already granted the golden age people would mean a somewhat better position, because that increase would not be completely eroded by the ceaseless increase in the cost of living. But the Canadian people will quickly understand, and especially the pensioners, that this is not all the same a real and net increase. It does not mean either an increase in the purchasing power of the 65-year old people but at the most a normal and just measure to maintain the pensioners' purchasing power. So that, Mr. Speaker, the people of 65 or over find themselves like their fellow citizens, like the average citizen, the knife-grinder, the dealer, in that they are at grips with the cost-of-living problems.

The measures announced by the right hon. Prime Minister to check the cost-of-living increase are but a partial solution to the inflation problems on the national level. Moreover, those measures came once the harm was done, when the crisis was at its pinnacle. And we realize today how appropriate it was for my party last Friday to be able to have Bill C-219 amended so that the railway workers may get a better treatment to cope with the cost of living.

The government, Mr. Speaker, did not worry enough about the condition of the average people, the average Canadian, the ordinary taxpayer, the one whose tax is deducted from his salary, the one who cannot cheat the revenue department. Those Canadians are probably the ones who are forgotten by this government. The government has not announced anything, for instance, concerning rates of interest on mortgages, the 11 per cent tax on building materials, transportation, special taxes on clothing for adults. He stopped half-way, that is with clothing for children. There are so many areas beside food where the constant increase in the cost of living is being felt. And yet, most Canadians, whether they are less or more than 60 years of age expected some concrete measures in these specific areas. The government was content, unfortunately, with a partial approach and incomplete solutions, mostly because of the cost of living, but also for other reasons which stem from the very concept of our society.

Social inequalities go unchanged in this country. The imbalance in the access to human achievement is also being perpetuated in this country. In the very name of social justice, more should have been done, Mr. Speaker. In order to convince ourselves better, we have but to read the Labour Day message of the Canadian Catholic Conference.

I do not intend to repeat what the bishops said, even though I am in excellent company, but I will limit myself, Mr. Speaker, to quoting four sentences which could probably be reflected upon by us all while we discuss the problem of the cost of living, and in particular, its incidence on senior citizens.

Here is the first sentence:

1. Why must the little consumers with fixed incomes bear the weight of the spiraling cost of living while corporations continue to increase their profits?