

• (5:20 p.m.)

[English]

Mrs. Grace MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, during the course of this debate I believe we have had about all the facts and figures that could possibly be given regarding this legislation. In speaking on second reading and when the bill was before the committee, many members outlined the reasons they believe this bill fails to meet the elementary needs of the old age pensioners in this country and the elementary standards of justice and fairness which have been built up for so long in the establishment of the principle of universality in old age pensions. This afternoon in particular my colleague the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) very thoroughly covered the ground again.

I was interested to note that the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. Osler) is not at all convinced about this legislation. He appears to be very unhappy about this feature of removing the escalation clause for the people who will now be on the \$80 fixed pension. He gave every evidence of this because he indicated that he trusts that when the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) brings in his next budget, if there should be an increase in the cost of living, ways and means would be found to bring back the escalation provision. I suggest that part of the reason the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre sees this so clearly is his location vis-à-vis the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre and the fact that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has succeeded in reaching the older people across this country in such a way that they are able to understand what has been happening. He has been able to open their eyes concerning what is happening in respect of this bill. If the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre can be shaken in his belief that this bill is what it should be, I believe it would be an excellent idea if we could find ways and means to bring some of the other members of the government into much closer proximity to the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

This bill contains many faults. The amount is completely inadequate. The flight from universality to selectivity has been accelerated and continued. That flight began in 1966 with the provision of the so-called guaranteed income supplement. As I said at the time in my view it was a complete prostitution of the English language to speak of it as a guaranteed income supplement. It was no such thing. This bill also increases the divisiveness among our citizens. It separates the elderly citizens into two groups, with the poor having to finance the destitute. The freezing of the amount of \$80 indefinitely is indeed a very bad thing. The one comfort we have is that the "indefinitely" may not be very long when the facts concerning this matter are known by a large enough group of people across this country. It will not only be the elderly people who will face the impact of this \$80 freeze in respect of the old people of the country. In my correspondence I have a great many letters in which the point is made over and over again that the sons and daughters of elderly people, hard-up as they are through trying to bring up their own families in decency and with educa-

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tion in today's conditions, are hard hit when they find that in addition they must help finance their elderly parents.

This is the situation we started to get away from in 1927 with the provision of old age pensions in the amount of \$20 a month at age 70 with a means test. A couple of labour Members of Parliament, with a few farm members thrown in, about 15 or 16 members in all, were able to take advantage of a balance of power situation to force this old age pension legislation on a government which did not wish to have anything to do with it. The Liberal government in those days did not wish to have anything to do with such legislation. The truth that Liberals and Conservatives have no sympathy whatsoever for this type of legislation lies in the fact that this pension legislation which was enacted in 1927 was the first social security legislation to appear on the federal statute books of this country in which the two old parties had been in power since 1867. Eventually, we secured universality in the old age pension. But now we find the government is using its position of power to begin to retreat again and attempt to get rid of this legislation bit by bit.

• (5:30 p.m.)

My next point concerns the removal of the 2 per cent escalation provision from those who are frozen at the \$80 level. The hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. Osler) is no longer in the chamber, but I want to point out that when he spoke he was on both sides of the fence, draped half on one side and half on the other, which I might assure him was a rather ungraceful position for a person of his physical stature and looked very uncomfortable. He seemed to be undecided about which side he would flop on to before his speech was finished.

If it was a good thing, a desirable thing to remove the 2 per cent escalator provision with respect to people receiving \$80 a month, why is the government not proposing legislation to eliminate that escalator feature from the Canada Pension Plan, the retired public servants legislation, the armed forces pensions, the pensions of Members of Parliament and other federal pension plans? Why does it not do this with these other pensions as well? There is only one reason, and that is that the government knows it can get away with it where old age pensions are concerned. The people receiving the Canada Pension Plan are too well organized to permit the withdrawal of that clause in their case. The retired public servants are too well organized to permit the government to withdraw that clause in their case. Likewise, the armed forces are too well organized. Members of Parliament would shriek to high heaven if anybody suggested taking the escalator clause from their pension plan.

This is a very mean thing that the government is doing to our elderly people. Our elderly people are helpless: they are not well organized; they are without friends in high places. That is why they are discriminated against. But, Mr. Speaker, the worst feature of this whole business is that we cannot turn down this legislation in spite of all the injustices and wrong things in it, simply because of the ingenious and diabolical way in which it is worked. Our old people are divided into two classes and