

much, and are at all times trying to cut down the amount of money which goes to them to meet their needs and requirements.

On December 29 on behalf of the registered blind people of my constituency I received from Mr. William G. Hope a petition with hundreds of signatures on it, urging the governments in Ottawa and in Halifax to take certain special actions because of this special disability and the resultant disabilities which go with being blind. I immediately forwarded the recommendations in this particular petition to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) in Ottawa and to the minister of social services in Halifax. The recommendations were these:

Remove the present inequitable means test used to categorize blind persons in allotting allowances or raise the present ceiling to \$8,000 per year for married couples.

Provide free prescription drugs to registered blind persons through the M.S.I. program.

That is a Nova Scotia program. There are hundreds and hundreds of signatures. These blind people are under the leadership of Mr. Hope, who is partially blind and whose spouse is blind. They worked together with the blind people in Cumberland county to put this petition together.

● (1740)

This motion is an indication of the fact that the hon. member for Selkirk recognizes that blind people are not getting enough attention, either from the federal or provincial governments, to enable them to overcome the very significant disabilities they face in their every-day lives. For this reason I commend him as highly as I can. There are a lot of other things he could be saying in this House that would probably be more politically advantageous to him. It is probable that in his constituency there are very few blind people, just as there are in all 264 constituencies in this country, but that did not stop him from feeling compassion for people who have a very special and unique disability, and for singling them out. While I recognize that there are many other disabled people in this country, blindness is a very special and unique kind of disability and should receive special consideration by the Government of Canada or the province in which these people live.

As the hon. member has said, what he is asking for is not that much, but it would be a guarantee. For instance Mr. Hope, who presented the petition to me, just happened to be able to secure employment. But as a result his wife lost her allowance. In other words, as soon as he was able to find employment she was penalized, even though by his finding employment she did not then discover that she could see. She did discover, however, that no further assistance was available to her to overcome her disability.

I say that this House, this parliament, if it has compassion, if it has a collective soul, will take to heart what the hon. member for Selkirk has proposed in his resolution and try in some way to show the blind people of the country that parliament does relate to the problems they face. When it is a unique problem such as blindness we should endeavour to put our stamp of compassion on a special kind of legislation that

will single them out. We should show that we will endeavour to assist them in a material way to overcome some of the real and terrible problems that they face in their everyday life.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I should like to congratulate the hon. member for Selkirk, and to tell him that this is what I think members of parliament should be doing more often. If they did, then the people in Canada would think that parliament was a lot more realistic about the problems that face the people of this country.

**Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Mr. Speaker, I should like to indicate that I warmly welcome the presentation of this motion by the hon. member for Selkirk (Mr. Whiteway). I wish also to indicate that it has my support. There are one or two changes I should like to see made to it and I shall indicate what they are in a moment. The main point I want to make, however, is that what is asked for in this motion is a policy that I believe we should follow.

I listened with interest this afternoon to the first speech made by the hon. member for Bruce-Grey (Mr. Douglas) since his appointment as a deputy whip on the government side. I noticed with interest that he expressed sympathy with the motion put forward by the hon. member for Selkirk, but then he turned around and threw cold water on it or, in effect, opposed it. Why do I say that in effect he opposed it despite his expressions of sympathy? I say that because at least the hon. member for Bruce-Grey came to grips with what is the heart of the motion put forward by the hon. member for Selkirk, namely, that we should not apply to our blind persons the stigma and indignity of means tests. Those words "stigma and indignity" were words used by the hon. member for Bruce-Grey. But precisely because the assistance that blind persons can get today, whatever the amount, is under a means test, I say that is the way we are treating them.

From the late twenties when pensions for the blind were first added to the Old Age Pensions Act, until the end of 1951 at which time that legislation was replaced by the Old Age Security Act, the Blind Persons Act and the Old Age Assistance Act, there was a relationship between blind pensions and old age pensions. It so happened that in those years both were subject to a means test but at least there was a continuing relationship and, when the old age pension went up, the blind pension went up as well.

Beginning on January 1, 1952, we established a new regime under which we put old age security on a universal basis, but this was not done with pensions for the blind. In the intervening period the difference in the amount available has widened instead of the parallelism being maintained.

The hon. member for Bruce-Grey makes something out of the fact that most provinces assist the blind now under the Canada Assistance Plan rather than under the Blind Persons Act. They do that because the legislation that has been drawn up by the federal government makes it at least a little better to do it under the Canada Assistance Plan. He also makes the point that if we are going to do this for the blind we should do it for paraplegics, multiple amputees, and other disabled per-