

Old Age Security

disappointed and heartbroken senior citizens in our nation as a result of this legislation.

The crowning insult to the senior citizen who only receives the basic old age security pension is the fact that the government will now take away from him the 2 per cent cost of living bonus which was designed to stop the erosion of the purchasing power of the pension. This is one of the most discriminatory and unfair changes in this amending bill. It is contrary to a number of recent pension plans in which clauses have been included covering the escalation of the pensions. Why has the government deliberately chosen to disregard this principle in respect of pensioners who receive only a basic old age security pension? Why have they been singled out for this type of discrimination?

Let us briefly examine several pension plans which recently have been approved by this House. A little less than a year ago, we accepted the principle that the pensions granted under a number of plans should be escalated so as to prevent the rising cost of living from eroding the purchasing power of the pension. This makes sense. Retired people should be protected against inflation and against a lowering of their standard of living by this method. As a result, after accepting the principle, we applied it to a number of pension plans which come under our jurisdiction. It now applies to the pensions of retired civil servants, retired RCMP personnel, retired armed forces personnel and retired Members of Parliament.

If these groups are entitled to pension escalation because of the rising cost of living, then this principle should be applied also to the basic old age security pension. The total income of the pensioners who receive the basic old age security pension plus part of the supplement is not nearly sufficient. The maximum amount a single individual can now obtain with the basic pension of \$80 plus the full supplement of \$55 is a total of \$135 a month. No one can live adequately on this amount, especially in those areas where rents take such a large chunk of the pension cheque. It is high time we set an adequate minimum income level for Canadians and made certain that all Canadians receive it. This is a special need of those whom we class as our senior citizens because they have little chance to supplement their income once they reach retirement age.

We had hoped to see an old age security pension of \$150 a month, with a supplement for those who have no additional income. The present legislation falls far short of this goal. We also hoped there would be a provision to fully cover any future increase in living costs. We find that this is not to be, insofar as the group of senior citizens who receive only the basic pension is concerned.

I shall not spend a great deal of time dealing with the other aspects of the bill. Other members in the various parties have spoken concerning the number of people affected by this legislation. Other deficiencies in the legislation have been pointed out. It is my hope that in the committee some amendments will be made to the legislation which will be acceptable to all parties in this House. If these amendments are not forthcoming through com-

[Mr. Harding.]

mittee examination, then it is assumed that a number of amendments will be moved when the bill returns to the House of Commons. When the bill returns to the House we will have an opportunity to deal in more detail with those clauses which we feel require amendment.

In closing, I suggest that the lack of an adequate basic pension increase is a disgrace. Surely, Canada can do better than set the pension at the level of \$80. Surely, Canada, which has one of the highest standards of living in the world, can devise a means to make certain that the total income of this nation is distributed a little more fairly than this piece of legislation does. Let me say this: You are not going to satisfy the old age pensioners and we do not intend to stop fighting for a pension which will come closer to meeting their needs than does the niggardly approach this government has taken.

Mr. Pepin: You have done this for 30 years now. All you do is continually ask for more.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Harding: It is alright, Mr. Speaker; we do not mind the minister complaining about the fact that this party fights for the underprivileged in this country. We will continue to do this. We will continue to fight until we reach the stage where the poverty line in this country disappears and we do not have to be needling this government year in and year out to do its job. Under a just society you have objectives and aims, and you should be moving in that direction; but you are not doing it. That is why we are calling for action today.

• (3:30 p.m.)

Mr. Béchard: That is what we are doing.

Mr. Harding: We see people who talk of progress, and are supposed to be progressive in their outlook, allowing standards such as this to be legislated in 1970 in Canada.

In closing, may I say that I think it is a disgrace that we are going to offer to our senior citizens a basic pension of \$80. It is amazing that we can do so much for other groups of pensioners, but just because these people have not the power to use a lever on this government, members of the government sit back and go to sleep. I am very disappointed that the minister and the government, after months and months of considering income security for all Canadians, would come down with legislation such as this which makes the poor subsidize the poor. You have had reports on tax reform, so why do you not use some of them to give the senior citizens of our country the break which they should have had many years ago?

Mr. J. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I will speak briefly. The essential points in this debate have been made but, as is the case with most debates in this place and in committees, the central points are made, the logic is acknowledged, the facts are