

Old Age Security Act (No. 2)

That, Mr. Speaker, gives me a chance to answer the Hon. Member for Vancouver East (Mrs. Mitchell) of the NDP, who asked a very cute but irresponsible question. She is not irresponsible herself; I suppose it is because she did not think enough about it. She said, well, if inflation is coming down, why implement our program? It is because we want it to continue; we want this to make sense to Canadians and have inflation go down to 6 per cent. I mean, it is extraordinary. We announced our policy, I think, on June 28 in the budget of the then Minister of Finance. That was six months ago. We have made every possible effort to bring down prices under federal regulation, salaries when we could, and benefits like those we are talking about today for those mothers or seniors who do not need any supplement, in order to bring inflation down to half what it is now. We are succeeding. But once more, the New Democratic Party does not live because of success; it lives because of failures. I do not understand that. I am very pleased when I wake up in the morning and hear the CBC tell me that for the first time in years inflation is no longer double-digit.

Mr. Riis: There is a depression in the country, and prices come down during a depression.

Miss Bégin: That proves that as a responsible Government we must implement this Act. We seem to be on the right track and we must continue. I think that is very important.

Now, it will be a pleasure for me to answer the question, if he still has one, of the Hon. Member for Kamloops-Shuswap (Mr. Riis).

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Hon. Minister providing this opportunity to clarify an issue she raised. She indicated she felt it was appropriate for senior citizens to be asked to share in the six and five program equitably with other Canadians. Again, that is a sacrifice that Canadians ought to be making in this war on inflation.

I would ask the Minister to explain from her perspective the fairness of a program which results in Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament receiving thousands and thousands of dollars by way of increases in their incomes as a result of the program, yet senior citizens are receiving only a few hundred dollars increase. Can she explain how she perceives this to be a fair and equitable program?

• (1630)

Miss Bégin: Mr. Speaker, I could try, but it is not easy with an NDP Member who uses rhetoric and ideology instead of facts. The Hon. Member mentioned the fact that in our society everybody does not get the same salary. Well, that is not my fault. If socialism is to give everyone the same salary, I am a socialist at heart but how is that done? I have never heard in my whole life someone give an explanation of that in a free country like ours; I just never heard of it.

I see the Hon. Member rising; surely he will have the courtesy to let me finish my explanation. He criticized the fact that Ministers make more than backbenchers in the Opposition. That is a fact of life. Doctors, engineers, architects and

many professional workers make much more. For example, the NDP unionized the membership in the City of Hamilton and other large industrialized cities. They make much more than when I became a backbencher ten years ago. I am very pleased about that.

Everybody is capped. I have not made the exact calculation; I did not even know that I would be receiving a small increase in January. But I do know that the Members and Ministers of the House, as a pro rata of our salary, accepted a capping more than other Canadians because we started on July 1, six months before other Canadians. I think that is part of the game and I accept it fully. Beyond that point, if the Hon. Member is displeased because salaries are different in society, that is the kind of society we have and it is a free one.

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, I know that the Hon. Minister has a few moments of her time remaining. Would she permit one further point?

Miss Bégin: A question, yes.

Mr. Riis: The Minister, in her response, was looking for a way to make the six and five program more equitable, to allow a greater amount of sacrifice of a more equitable nature. If a person were making \$100,000 per year, would she not consider that that person might pay a higher percentage of the inflation-fighting program and someone making \$10,000 per year might not be asked to make any sacrifice at all? In other words, there could be a scale and, depending upon one's level of income, one would then pay or be indexed or whatever as a reflection of the difference in incomes.

Miss Bégin: This is exactly the intent of my Bills which are being studied in the House right now. We have used a device different from the one proposed by the Hon. Member. By the way, the Member made one omission; he forgot to speak of somebody who does the job, the income tax department. The income tax department, first of all, does some equalization, but of course it does not make the salary of everyone the same.

The philosophy of six and five applied to pensions and to Family Allowances—and I realize that today we are talking about the pensions Bill—is that we wanted all Canadians not in need to share in the struggle against inflation. For pensions we had the natural mechanism at our disposal, namely the supplement or the so-called GIS. That is why we made very clear that all seniors who receive the supplement, even partial supplements, are not being asked for any sacrifice and receive, of course, the full indexation which protects those most in need in society. That is the way we achieved the same objective.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jim Hawkes (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-131 constitutes a direct attack on our 1.2 million senior citizens. Seldom has this House seen a piece of legislation as poorly conceived and makeshift and small-minded, and which could have such disastrous consequences, as the Bill we are considering this evening.