

*Old Age Security Act (No. 2)*

and support their Government in terms of confidence. That is the essence of the Pearson precedent in 1968.

When I read stories about certain Members of Parliament changing their ground just a wee bit, I have to ask myself, why? Who is so mesmerized by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) when he says it is a matter of confidence? If it is a matter of confidence, I wonder how some of those Members would appreciate going to the country on the basis of attacking senior citizens—which is how it will be construed—or attacking those Pensioners under the Supplementary Retirement Benefits Act. That is the raw politics of it.

It goes beyond raw politics in this Bill. I hold it as a principle that those who are outside the work force, those who are making no contribution in the real sense in terms of work, in terms of making demands, those who have run their course in terms of a regular work day and ask nothing else but that they have a chance to live in a reasonable amount of peace, ought not to be the tools or the levers for Government redistribution of income. It is as simple as that.

We brought in indexing and all of us supported indexing. Why? Because we said those people were different, they do not have the levers to bargaining power that others have. They need to be protected. Whether it be a new index, a senior citizens' index, the consumer price index or whatever it is, we must protect them. It is no protection, in my judgment, for that group to see their indexing limited.

The Public Service accepts that the indexing of their wages and salaries should be limited. They do not like it. Members of Parliament do not like it when it happens to them, but they accept it. Why? Because they can bargain again and hopefully make it up. But the problem is that those people in the latter years of their life cannot do so. You just do not lose those two years; you lose the progression upwards with the index whenever it is taken off.

If the Government will not forecast anything in the economy in terms that are reliable because they say it is impossible, how can they say with certainty today that inflation will be reduced to six and five? I hope it will be, but how can they say that? Why should they leave those people exposed?

• (1600)

That is the issue of principle, pure and simple. It is not just a little matter of administration, shifting funds from here to there. Whether talking about this bill, Old Age Security, or about the Supplementary Retirement Benefits Act, there is a contract, an agreement and an understanding.

This Bill goes right to the heart of social programs. It is the basis of it. There is much more than just an agreement or contract; there is a moral obligation on society. It is becoming apparent that that moral obligation is getting greater every year. The statistics are startling. I will not trouble the House with them because I understand another Member wants to follow me and I will listen to her. However, the statistics in terms of the aging and our obligation are growing.

They are growing in a time when we have decided to undercut the elderly in terms of our obligation. That is wrong. Therefore, I intend to vote against the Bill. No amount of petty-fogging, no amount of meetings with groups of senior citizens in Quebec and no amount of meetings of any kind will stop me from doing that.

I do not say this because senior citizens in my constituency have been in touch with me. Long before I saw this Bill, I held it to be morally wrong. It is morally wrong for this Parliament to support that proposition. Parliament has a special obligation to senior citizens. They look to us to answer that special obligation. They look to this Minister to answer that special obligation. I do not know what they are saying in Quebec to the Hon. Member for Montreal-Sainte-Marie, but they are saying something different to the Hon. Member for Nepean-Carleton and, I dare say, to other Members of this House.

The Hon. Member for Montreal-Sainte-Marie said that when we, Members of Parliament, were travelling in Europe they, the great Liberal Party, were defending the Old Age Security payment. Some defence! A couple of days of debate, one Minister and one Member getting up to defend it, not on the basis of this program but on the basis of other programs the Government has put in place. We agree with those other programs. There is no argument there. The argument with this Bill is solely and simply whether it is right to cap that index in terms of recipients of the Old Age Security.

If that index was put there to ensure that those who are defenceless are defended, in the sense that we in Parliament on both sides of the House defend them, then indexing had a purpose. We ought not to forget the purpose. Those who are defenceless look to us to protect their standard of living. This is not going to be done willy-nilly in the dark of night in a budget speech of which there was no advance warning. We voted against that budget speech which contained exactly this provision.

I want Members opposite to go to their senior citizens and then get up in this House, every one of them, and tell the country that they are supporting denying full benefits to the senior citizens of this country. I do not want them to sit there silently but to get up and speak. There must be someone opposite who agrees with me. I cannot believe that the Liberal Party is so bereft of the principle it once stood for; I cannot believe that is the case.

I want those opposite to go to the Government House Leader and ask him to remove their gags so that they can get up to speak on this very important Bill. This Bill is going to be fought in the House of Commons for as long as we can fight it, using every legitimate parliamentary means. When it goes to committee, and I assume it will at some time if the Government is so determined, we will fight it there.

I say to my friends opposite that it is quite safe for them to vote against a Bill involving changes in Old Age Security. It is quite safe to vote against a Bill to change the arrangements with respect to supplementary retirement benefits. The Government will not be defeated. Does anyone think the Government would go to the country standing behind in the polls as it