

Old Age Security Act (No. 2)

Mr. Halliday: There are a lot of problems with Bill C-131, Mr. Speaker. I want to touch on just a few of them. When the Minister appeared before the committee she made the suggestion that the Government was going to look after anybody who was on GIS. That was very benevolent of the Minister. We appreciate the fact that she is at least willing to show some concern for those who are GIS recipients. She was intimating, although she did not say so in so many words, that the bulk of Canadian pensioners were eligible to receive GIS. Of course, that is not true. With all due respect to the Minister, she was a little bit misleading to the senior citizens.

Miss Bégin: No.

Mr. Halliday: Only 15 per cent of the pensioners in Canada get the full benefit of GIS.

Miss Bégin: Fifty-five per cent do get some.

Mr. Halliday: The Minister says that 55 per cent do get some. That is true. Some get a very little bit. But I was saying that only 15 per cent of all pensioners are provided with the full provisions of GIS. We must not forget that it leaves an awful lot, 85 per cent, of senior citizens who will suffer to a greater or lesser extent from this drop in income which the Minister has provided.

Miss Bégin: That is not true.

Mr. Thacker: They can't hack that over there.

Mr. Halliday: Another thing that bothers me is the refusal of the Government to accept the very reasonable amendment proposed by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Okanagan North (Mr. Dantzer). He is our expert critic on the subject of pensions. He pointed out by way of his amendment, which the Government turned down, that the plans of the Government are not to provide this increase in the OAS payments at the end of 1984 as we proposed in our amendment. We felt that we could probably go along with this reduction for a two-year period, as the Minister suggested, if she would agree to increasing it up to the regular level again for 1985 and onward. But the Government and the Minister refused to do that. Therefore, what we find is that our senior citizens will suffer for the rest of their lives from a lower level of payment, no matter what the indexing feature is in future years. Because of what is being done now all senior citizens who are on OAS will receive less.

● (1730)

What concerns me about attacking senior citizens' pensions is that they suffer the most from this Government's penchant to increase various kinds of sales taxes inordinately. Seniors are unable to escape the marked increases in taxation on commodities such as oil, gas, heating fuels and other products which they need. Their expenditures tend to be high because of the increases they are faced with in the various Provinces.

Increases that are based simply upon the Consumer Price Index do not adequately meet their added cost of living which seniors must meet daily.

Another most inequitable factor which the Government has not faced up to is that a large majority of the 10 or 11 million people in the work force in Canada are not susceptible to the six and five program—unfortunately for the program—while the small sector of senior citizens who are not in the work force are included among those who have to submit to that six and five program. It may have been justifiable if they were in the work force.

I do not think I could conclude any better than by quoting a sentence from a statement made by a representative of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada at a hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs. She said:

In the world-wide Christian tradition, in terms of the sinking ship, women, children and the elderly go first to ensure that they may escape any harm. In this sinking ship, women and the elderly are expected to plug up the holes and keep the ship afloat.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Marceau (Jonquière): Mr. Speaker, as I rise to take part in this debate on Bill C-131, I would like to explain briefly my four reasons for doing so.

The first is that I have had an opportunity to observe the work of the Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs, of which I have been a member for many years, and to look carefully at our objectives and the reasons why we now have to introduce such a Bill, which is clearly unpleasant and politically damaging.

However, Mr. Speaker, I must point out that although many groups were invited to appear before our Committee, all those wanting to express their views have had the opportunity to do so because all those interested in speaking were able to appear. We can therefore conclude, Mr. Speaker, that there are more intelligent people than we might think. There are more people who are aware that when a Government takes its responsibilities, it receives public approval. In view of the reactions we heard in Committee, we can see that, while those people might not accept all our reasons, they still understood that we had to do something and that what we did was necessary and urgent.

Mr. Speaker, my second reason for taking part, probably very briefly, in this debate, is that, as Government Members, we are often criticized for blindly following Government policy while not having the courage to approve it publicly, and for not assuming our responsibilities as members of the Government team. I must therefore say that if I have decided to take part in this debate and state that I shall support this Bill, it is because I feel that it is my duty as member of a Government which realizes that, under the present conditions problems have to be faced and we accept the responsibilities that these problems involve. It is therefore as a Government Member that I shall vote for this Bill, probably with regret, as all of my colleagues, because the capping of people's pensions and