

Old Age Security Act (No. 2)

I want to mention again the door-to-door canvassing of my constituency which I undertook last September. Pensioner after pensioner expressed fear of continually rising prices, and said how even a cutback of \$12 monthly would make a significant difference in coping with the grim realities of day-to-day life. Rents, food and the cost of everything that pensioners buy, go up. I do not think it is right for a Government that spends \$100 million on advertising its own Departments to expect pensioners to bear the burden of the ever-rising deficit. Fully 62.5 per cent of my constituents who responded to a questionnaire believed that benefits to the elderly should be increased rather than decreased. The very people this Bill is now victimizing are the survivors of the great depression and two world wars; surely it is time that their struggle ended.

Another point which I wish to make is that this unjust and immoral measure will effectively bring few returns to the Government, for all the fuss it is making. Estimates from the Department of National Health and Welfare show that capping OAS will save about \$31 million in 1983. Mr. Speaker, what is that against a projected budget deficit of \$23 billion for this year? Let us look at other areas where we can cut Government waste; for instance, the Government will spend three times more on advertising its programs this year than it will save by putting the burden of inflation on the backs of the elderly of this country.

In addition, Bill C-131 really reflects a lack of confidence on the part of the Government in its own six and five program. If inflation truly does drop to the targets of 6 and 5 per cent, then this Bill will be totally unnecessary as OAS benefits will be indexed to these levels in any event. But if inflation is really substantial, then Bill C-131 is a monstrosity, for it will take income away from senior citizens right when they need it most. If the Government is so optimistic that it has the answers to the problem of inflation, then why does it want a Bill to do what its six and five program is touted to do?

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I am appalled at the Government's use of closure and what I expect to be its automatic rejection of the amendment offered by the Hon. Member for Calgary West. The Bill breaks trust, it creates hardship and it is an ad hoc response to a fundamental issue facing our society. We should have spent the time we have given to this debate discussing instead a program that the Government could bring forth to deal with the "greying" of Canada. Surely it is evident that in future a greater proportion of our population will be over the age of 65. This will present a great social problem and a challenge, as it will be necessary to change many aspects of our society. We must not only deal with the elderly but we must draw on their experience for the benefit of the whole of society, not treat them as cast-offs waiting to draw their last breath.

I shall present a motion on a comprehensive program for aging under Private Members' Motions when the new session of Parliament begins—if that ever comes about. This session seems to be going on interminably and is doing damage to Canada.

I want to address the crucial question of a comprehensive program for aging because I believe we are going to have to pay some very serious attention to ways of increasing the number of residences for senior citizens. We must also make more home support available to senior citizens. They want nothing more than to be able to stay in the homes they have had for years and have probably paid for. They may not need a great amount of money to live on but do need some support in the years left to them.

I should also like to see more support for cultural activities for senior citizens, and I should like them to have the opportunity to engage in voluntary and community work. There is an enrichment of society there upon which all of us can draw. It is wrong to think that because someone is over 65 they cannot make a contribution to society.

I could talk for a long time about the number of famous people in history such as Schweitzer, Churchill, Pope John XXIII and any number of composers and artists who made great contributions in their fields and to humanity after they reached the age of 65. There will be an opportunity for more of that in the future because of the greying of our society. We do not want just to tolerate senior citizens or treat them as whipping boys. We must treat senior citizens as an integral part of society, recognizing in this new technological age that they can make greater contributions to our society if only we treat them decently and provide them with the basic level of support and services that they need.

● (1240)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Does the Hon. Member for Simcoe South (Mr. Stewart) stand to be recognized for debate or for questioning?

Mr. Stewart: For debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): The Chair will recognize the Hon. Member for debate.

Mr. Ron Stewart (Simcoe South): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand and oppose Bill C-131, an Act to amend the Old Age Security Act. Once again, with obvious predictability, this Government has chosen to invoke closure with respect to a debate over an issue which is in strong dispute. Repeatedly, and with good reason, this Government has been described as arrogant. The word "arrogant" as we all know, means overbearing, presumptuous and haughty. The arrogance of this Government is reflected in almost every move it makes, every pronouncement it utters and every attitude it conveys. Now, its disdain for our senior citizens is shown by allowing only 17 hours of debate on this most important Bill and only four sessions to hear witnesses.

Nowhere and under no circumstances does this arrogance assume more dangerous proportions than when it seems to achieve a dismissal of the established democratic rights of this House, and by natural extension the rights of Canadians, whom we all represent, particularly, of course, our senior