

Old Age Security Act (No. 2)

we did maintain full indexing of pensions, the Government of Quebec, through its Minister of Housing, Mr. Tardif, has announced that the rates for all subsidized housing in Quebec would be increased by between 20 and 30 per cent. So of course, senior citizens preferred to take our side, not so much because they approved limited indexation but in order to convince the Government of Quebec and the other provincial governments and the private sector that they would have to do their part to bring inflation down to six per cent.

Mr. Speaker, in concluding, I wish to congratulate the Minister for the work she has done in the health sector in general and for what she has done for senior citizens. I can assure you that I shall be proud to vote in favour of this Bill and thus help those who need it most.

● (1550)

[*English*]

Hon. Walter Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I listened with great pleasure to the distortions of the Member for Montréal-Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart). It was the nature of his speech and the fact that he decided to make a speech in the House that caused me to rise.

There has been a full two days' debate in this House. It was begun by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) putting forward her proposals. As she put them forward I watched her face, and I thought that if ever I saw a Minister not convinced about the righteousness of her brief, a brief which attacked the senior citizens of the country, that she on platform after platform had said she would defend, it was on that day in the House.

Although she and I sit on opposite sides of the House of Commons, I want to say that my heart went out to her.

Miss Bégin: Where is it?

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): An indication of just how bad the atmosphere is in the Government Party is that today, well into the debate, is the first time there has been a private Liberal Member of Parliament rise to make a short speech extolling the virtue of attacking the senior citizens of the country, those people who receive Old Age Security in Canada. These people are more exposed in terms of inflation and uncertainty than any other group.

The Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Evans) is behind the curtain nodding his head and saying it is not true. I want to say to the Member from Ottawa Centre, come into the House, go to your place and defend this attack on the senior citizens of the country. At the same time defend the attack of your Government on the public servants of the country, on the members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, on those who served the country as members of the Armed Forces, and their widows and families. State the position. Do not stand behind the curtain; come into the House and state the position. Are they going to stand with those pieces of legislation, or are they going to vote against them? I have heard people say they are against this Bill as it is written; they are against another

Bill as it is written. I want to know when the votes are counted where they stand.

I want to say to my friends, those who have remained silent over there on Old Age Security, that there is a power in a Government caucus if a Government caucus is prepared to exercise it. This seems to be the only Parliament in the western world where all of the discussions take place in private. I was in the United Kingdom a week ago yesterday and watched a debate and finally a vote in their House of Commons, where the Conservative Government of Great Britain was attacking a socialist program. I listened to Conservative Member after Member after Member of the Parliament in Great Britain stand up and attack the proposal by the Government. When the time came they did not scuttle into their seats to vote confidence in the Government; they abstained, and one of them even voted against the Government.

That is how Government listen. I and my other friends make speeches in this House of Commons but no one on that side listens. Those members of the Treasury benches will not listen. That is the way the system works. We can state a certain position. The Government will be accountable at the next election.

If there is real opposition to something, whether with respect to pensions for Old age Security recipients or with respect to public servants, members of the RCMP, the Armed Services, their widows or their families, and if there is an honest belief that what the Government is doing is wrong, then it is morally wrong for Members of Parliament not to stand up and vote against, or abstain, but never to use the excuse that confidence in the Government is at stake, that the Government may fall if they exercise their right of independence. Yet that is what they are saying. I say that is wrong. There is not a self-respecting person in the country who thinks about the system who does not believe that that is wrong.

The situation is this. If the Government of Canada was defeated on Bill C-133 or defeated on this Bill involving Old Age Security—of course, it is an important Bill—I will wager that they would not dare face the country on their attack on senior citizens. You bet they would not, Mr. Speaker. The next day they would be in here with a motion of confidence. That is when the Liberal Members and others who have confidence in the Liberal Government would have the chance to vote confidence. But not with respect to a piece of legislation; that is not how the system works.

The Pearson precedent has certainly affected the question of confidence in the Canadian House of Commons, but it does not only affect those who are against the Government because of where we sit in the House or because of how we feel; it also affects those who support the Government.

I want to say to my friend from Ottawa Centre and to all my friends opposite, whether we are dealing with this Bill C-131 or Bill C-133 with respect to the Supplementary Retirement Benefits Act for the broad Public Service of the country, that there is an opportunity for them to stand up and defeat their Government on the Bill. I will wager them dollars to donuts that the next day they will have a chance to stand up