

Economic Conditions

winter. Since they have been elected, they think that nothing else matters. I can recall one remark which I think is the most cynical remark I have heard in the House and perhaps one of the most stupid. It was made by the hon. member for Don Valley East (Mr. Smith), and it typifies the Liberal approach to power. We were in the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections questioning the propriety of cabinet ministers having a conflict of interest. I was attempting to point out that this cabinet minister did not have a blind trust if he knew what was in the trust. I think it was an honest mistake which the minister made, although I say that parenthetically.

The hon. member for Don Valley East argued with me about this blind trust for a while, and then he said, "Let's have a vote on it and we will see who is right." If we start to believe that the numbers which prevail in this House are always right instead of being sometimes wrong, we have reached a very sorry state. The Liberals believe that because they won the election, what they are doing is right.

Yesterday or the day before, the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) picked up his budget speech, tapped it, and said, "It is right in here that I am worried about inflation. What more do you want?" Mr. Speaker, we would like him to do something about inflation instead of thinking that because he has made the comment everybody should get in line and stop inflation. It is the Minister of Finance who is more responsible than anybody else. It was he who took on responsibility for the economic affairs of this country.

I would like to inform the House of some of the people who are seriously hurt by the inflation and the high rate of interest. I would like to describe the kind of constituency I come from. In 1971 there were 88,211 people in my constituency and in 1976 there were 88,151 people, a slight drop. Of these, among the male population, 2,265 are between 65 and 69. They are old age pensioners. In the bracket of 70 and over among the males there are 5,750 men. The female totals are for the 65 to 69 age bracket, 3,360, and for the 70 and over age bracket, 9,710. This means that in my constituency out of 88,000 people 21,000 are old age pensioners, and it comes to 24 per cent of the population.

In another grouping, the number of widows in my constituency is 9,895. If hon. members think that these people do not have problems, they simply do not know what is going on in the economy today. People buy their food, pay their rent and their fuel costs. These are three things which are absolutely necessary. People are not supposed to eat dog food. People should not have to sleep in the streets and they cannot heat their homes unless they pay their share of the fuel costs.

While I am on the subject, hon. members will recall that in the Clark budget brought down last December, fuel oil was excused from the excise tax. The government makes a great deal of the fact that during the election campaign it had raised the old age pension by \$35 per month. This was as it was reported by the CBC, which always has a kind of schizophrenic attitude toward politicians. It likes to run down the Liberal government and support the NDP until we get close to election day when it strikes them that despite their best efforts, the

NDP will not be elected, in a panic they swamp the Liberals with favourable remarks in their alleged news items which help to get the Liberals back and ensure that the Tories do not get in.

We on this side have a certain ironic sense of humour that it matters little to us because the CBC will support the NDP part of the time and the Liberals the rest of the time. Of course, the Liberals get the support when the crunch comes and the NDP do the same thing themselves, so they cannot complain. However, I have always resented the CBC reporting day after day during the election campaign that the Liberal party promised to raise old age pensions by \$35 a month. It was not the old age pension, it was the guaranteed income supplement.

The difference is that about 50 per cent of the old age pensioners do not draw the income supplement. So the \$35 monthly raise was not a universal raise at all. It was simply for the people who were drawing the income supplement, which is subject to a means test. I know it is useless to try to correct impressions which are left by the media, but the fact is that that \$35 a month raise, which seems to be the only answer the government has to what it intends to do to help the poor people out, applies to only half the old age pensioners.

Another thing I wish to say about this government's attitude toward pensions was brought up the other day by one of my colleagues, the hon. member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor), that widows of disability pensioners have an extended period over which their pensions will be phased in. Hon. members will recall that we had a vote on this during the debate on the veterans pension bill and we failed by two votes to force the government to make it unanimous that all widows of disability pensioners would draw the full pension to which they would be entitled under the bill instead of having to wait during the extended period of 6.5 years.

This amendment was brought in by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), and supported by us. We thought the government could find the money because, goodness knows, they are finding enough money to advertise their own party's position these days. This is a step which was never taken before in Canadian history, but they have no scruples about taking it now. However, that is the position. This is a group of people which should be considered. If the government is able to spend \$60 million on advertising the Prime Minister's ideas on the constitution, they should be able to find the money to pay the widows their disability pensions.

The other matter is spouses' allowances. We were glad to support the spouse's allowance a few years ago and we certainly supported it with the strong objection to the part of the bill which denied the spouse's allowance the day the pensioner died. So the government was intent on cutting off the allowance as soon as the spouse became a widow. After pressure from the opposition for some two years, it finally gave in and agreed to a continuous spouse's allowance until the widow became 65. What it has forgotten is that there are other women between the ages of 60 and 65 who are in the same