

Old Age Security Act (No. 2)

● (1620)

Hon. Allan B. McKinnon (Victoria): Mr. Speaker, as I join in the debate today, I suppose we are coming to the end of this trio of discriminatory legislation which the Government has seen fit to bring out. I might just briefly recall the remarks of the Hon. Member who spoke previously. He said that the Tories were in bed with the Liberals on this matter. Certainly we are not in bed with the Tories—with the Liberals on this matter.

An Hon. Member: We know you are not in bed with the Tories.

Mr. McKinnon: As I said the other day, when there is some noise in this House, it always comes from that small pack of lonesome souls on the left-hand side who are better at making noise than at making sense.

There are three Bills which we sometimes discuss. The NDP have been ostensibly or supposedly speaking on Bill C-131 today and on Bill C-133 a few days ago, but all their speeches have really been on Bill C-124. They like to claim that these are part of Bill C-124. Bill C-124 was the six and five legislation which, for the most part, applied to civil servants who are in the work force, with all that entails. Bills C-131 and C-133, which we oppose, are designed to apply against senior citizens. Some of them are more senior than others. My constituency has several of both kinds.

Bill C-131, which we are discussing today, hits at the old age pensioners and their pensions. The bill which we discussed a couple of days ago, Bill C-133, applied to retired civil servants. However, these are elderly people. Bill C-124 was made to apply against people still in the work force, still with bargaining capabilities, still with flexibility in their lifestyles and their choice of occupation. Not everyone has it, but some have. Of course, it is of interest that Bill C-124 called for a pay cut in the salary of MPs, which would lead to a pay cut in their pensions later on, and the NDP opposed the Bill. We voted in favour of that pay cut for MPs and it was passed. We have cheerfully paid the 5 per cent ever since and will continue to do so.

I see that the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Campbell) has entered the House. A little earlier today he spoke on a matter of some interest to me with regard to veterans. Concerning the indexation of veterans' pensions, the Minister has at times used terms which would lead people to draw the wrong conclusion. A matter of terminology is involved which is unfortunate. I am certain that the Minister does not intend to mislead some of the pensioners, but he does.

The Minister included a note with the last cheques sent out from the Department to disabled veterans and their widows and to those who receive the War Veterans Allowance. There may be others, but that is the general group to whom the cheques are sent. To the general public, a "veteran" means someone who served in a war or, I suppose, served in the forces for a long time. Indexation certainly does apply to many people who served in World War II. Disability cheques, not

veterans' cheques, are received by those who suffered disabilities during their service, probably in World War II or even in peacetime, although they are the rare exceptions, believe me.

In any event, the message included in those cheques sent out stated:

Dear friend,

Having heard a good deal about the Canadian Government's assault on inflation, you may have had some concern about the effect of the "six and five" program on your own pension. I am pleased to inform you that "six and five" restrictions do not apply to disability pensions or widows pensions.

That is fine, so far. It continues:

Effective January 1, 1983, disability pensioners and recipients of widows pensions will receive a cost of living increase of 11.5 per cent.

It is fine until that point, but then the Minister states:

The Canadian Government considers veterans to be a very special group of citizens.

He does not mention disabled veterans or widows of veterans, but he says that veterans are a very special group of citizens. He states:

It is for that reason the purchasing power of your cheque is being maintained by the addition of a full cost of living increase. It is the Government's way of saying "Thank You" to Canadian Veterans and their dependants for unselfish service when it was needed.

The problem there is that a great number of veterans who draw the old age pension and perhaps a small disability pension believe that they will not suffer from this legislation, but they certainly will, because if they are drawing the Old Age Security payment, they will be limited to the 6 per cent increase throughout the term of this year.

Today, the Minister again rose in response to a speech made by someone in the small group to our left, I believe, to point out that veterans' pensions had not been subject to a capping of indexation. It depends on what kind of a veteran one is. In terms of the veterans' disability pension, the Minister is correct. If he is referring to other pension cheques received by people who are veterans, he is incorrect. I would hope that he, being the gentleman that I know he is, would clear that up, possibly with another memorandum which he could send out with next month's cheques.

I would like to discuss briefly the position now of the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin). It can only be embarrassing, I assume, because of what she has allowed to happen as a result of this program. The Government has seen the old and infirm as its first target in its effort to show that it knows what restraint means. There is doubt that it knows what restraint means at all. Its intimate knowledge is far removed, I can assure Hon. Members. There is no indication that there will be any restraint in the Government's public attitude toward self-aggrandizement, self-advertising and looking after its friends in a variety of positions. Its attitude is exemplified in a letter issued on the subject a month or so ago which stated:

The people who will have this reduction in living standards imposed on them are single people with current annual incomes as low as \$8,640 and coupled with current annual incomes as low as \$11,760. These are not the nation's rich who are being asked to pay for the recession and the Government's fiscal problems.