

Old Age Security Act (No. 2)

their way, they would want to know where their Member stands.

Yesterday the Government introduced closure, although I am aware that it does not like that word, believing it is too cruel. Time allocation, which is the same thing, prolongs the agony a day or two; it is closure in all but name.

We must consider whether this Bill will seriously injure a group of citizens. I am aware that the reduction, beginning next month, will amount to only 50 cents per month. The Government will claim that that is peanuts and ask why we argue about it. If it is peanuts and does not mean much, then why did the Government propose it in the first place? Why did it not go after some other sectors of the economy that could better afford a reduction?

Our friends to the left support this Bill and each of the other Bills, as do we, but they have taken great exception to our support of Bill C-124 last August. Mr. Speaker, there is a great deal of difference between reducing the salaries of Members of Parliament and reducing to 6 per cent the increase given to members of the civil service who, we are well aware, are not among the most underpaid sections of the economy. We therefore agree that six and five is a good thing to aim for, but it should be aimed where you can get the money most easily and without harm.

If we look back at what our senior citizens have contributed to this country over the years, we see that it is a rather severe and draconian action to single them out and say they are going to have to bear their share of the burden. We should ask ourselves whether senior citizens have contributed to inflation. If that can be proven, then I suppose they should bear the blame.

I see the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) in the House. I have great admiration for the Minister and I know she is a very sympathetic person. I wish I could have been a fly on the wall in the Liberal caucus. I think the Minister probably said: "For God's sake, leave the senior citizens alone". I do not expect the Minister to divulge confidences in the Liberal caucus or the Liberal Cabinet, but I have enough confidence in her to think that that is what she did. She was sure talking to a tough bunch of nuts who said, in plain English, "to Hell with it"; and as a result senior citizens have to feel the weight of it.

● (1210)

Also it was pointed out by the Minister, because she had to make the best of a bad case, that the amount was not so much and that senior citizens who were in the direst of straits would obtain some benefit through the full indexation of the GIS. This will help them, but there are those people who are neither fish nor fowl and will probably be hurt. They are just a bit over the poverty line. Probably the \$50 a year at the present time will put them below the poverty line. Therefore, I consider this an absolute calamity.

Someone spoke about a tragedy and a calamity and was asked to define the difference. Let me say that Bill C-133 was

a tragedy for pensioners, members of the RCMP and all other people who had their pensions reduced. Certainly that Bill was a tragedy, but this Bill dealing with old age pensions is a calamity. The best example of the difference between those terms, as I heard the other day, would be this: Suppose the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) fell into the river, that would be a tragedy; but if someone fished him out, that would be a calamity.

This is the most important Bill of them all. Certainly we are opposed to them all, but if we can take our choice or our druthers, it would be Bill C-133 to cap the increase given to old age pensioners. They should be left alone.

The next Bill which will be coming up for discussion will be the one on Family Allowances. Certainly some mothers or persons who are designated to receive Family Allowance cheques are in pretty good income brackets. That Bill will not be too severe on them, but it will hurt those in the lower income brackets. It is very important to try to protect those who are hardest hit by inflation. Thank the Lord that inflation is starting to come down and will hopefully reach bottom.

Let me return to our senior citizens. The Government should have certainly left this group alone. I am well aware that some Hon. Members across the way voted against—

Mr. McKinnon: What do you mean by "left alone"?

Mr. Darling: I mean that this particular Bill C-133 should be thrown out and that senior citizens should be left alone. They did not have the nerve to monkey with or reduce the amounts on this one in January because it was written into the legislation. Naturally the Treasury Benches are looking forward to having this Bill rammed through so that they will at least be able to get their pound of flesh when the February cheques are ready for issuing.

As I was about to say earlier, there were certain Government Members who rose, spoke against and voted against Bill C-133. Of course, that Bill affects a significant segment of the economy, but the Bill before the House presently will affect literally tens and hundreds of thousands who are in much more serious financial positions—the pioneers of our land, the ones who worked so hard when there were not the benefits that are available now.

I know that my time is drawing to a close. It could be pointed out to me that I should not be speaking on the Bill because I have a conflict of interest. I have reached that august plateau where I, too, am a senior citizen. The Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Bussi eres) is certainly getting his pound of flesh back from me, and I am not worried about it. I hope that certain Members on the other side will rise and voice their opposition to this very important Bill, as they did to the other one.

[Translation]

Mr. David Kilgour (Edmonton-Strathcona): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I now rise to speak against this Bill on behalf of all Canadian senior citizens, of all their children, and also, I believe, of all Canadians across the land.