

Senior Citizens' Day

Mr. Speaker, nobody can find words for that masquerade, that blue Santa Claus suit that someone would have us put on today. In Quebec we feel we are being literally conned in this festive period with respect to the issues in the east end of Montreal, but here someone is trying to sell a crooked blue Santa Claus to senior citizens.

But, thank God, as on many other issues, the Official Opposition was there. I remember having to think things over and arrive at a decision: whether to go back to the National Assembly in Quebec or to stay here in Ottawa. And I will tell you that I had decided to stay here at the federal level, and here I am, knowing full well that I would be elected as an MLA in Quebec. And the strongest reason for staying here in Ottawa rather than going back to Quebec, as I said publicly, was that as we see it confirmed today, and my wife and children were of the same opinion—the present Prime Minister cannot be trusted with social programs. What is going on today justifies the decision I came to a month ago, Mr. Speaker.

I am looking at the Hon. Member who put that proposal forward. Maybe he was honest and sincere, but where was he when the decision was made to deindex old age security pensions? What did he do at that time to protect senior citizens from having their income slashed? What did he say at that time? They were ignoring everything about those people who built this country. Was it Mrs. Denis' indignation when she cried out with all her heart to the Prime Minister: "You have betrayed us, Charlie Brown!" Was it that cry that stirred you up and caused such twinges of conscience that you are looking for forgiveness? If that is what Progressive Conservative Members want to be forgiven for, I will help them. I am ready during the Christmas break—I will be spending Christmas with my family—but after the New Year, I am ready to organize in Quebec for all of Canada, a meeting with all the representatives of senior citizens's associations in Canada. We will sit down together, Liberals, New Democrats, Conservatives. We will listen to them, but we will do what they tell us. I have a small idea what they will ask about. It is not enough to have a day named in their honour. In the first place, they will say: Remove the discrimination in connection with the spouse allowance. Give it to everyone, whether they are single, separated or divorced.

Secondly, they will say: Tell your Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) and your Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) that within your reform of private pension plans you should add minimum indexation because the income from our pension plan was satisfactory seven or eight years ago, but today we are on social welfare, since our pensions have not been increased. Finally, with respect to the pension plan, Mr. Speaker, we should set aside that hypocrisy and that masquerade before the Christmas season.

I would rather we did not pass that measure, because we have to be sincere and honest but if after the holiday season

some Tory members want to co-operate with me to improve the quality of life of our senior citizens, I would suggest to all Members to reconsider their decision and to remove all those discriminations as soon as possible because it is a bad record for the Tories.

Mr. Jean-Guy Hudon (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for External Relations): Mr. Speaker, although lacking the experience of my hon. colleague from Montreal-Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart), I cannot agree with the general tenor of his speech, and I intend to try and explain, very calmly, why I disagree, and what my position is.

I think that as a group, the elderly are a very convenient subject for making political points and generalizations . . . I let you speak your piece . . . and generalizations, Mr. Speaker. It is easy to say that just before the holidays, these people are being abused. It is easy to make this point and that point just before Christmas—

Mr. Speaker, I have said before in the House that it is easy to confuse issues. I am against any form of indexation, Mr. Speaker, and indexation is being confused with universality, which is not the same thing at all. Removing indexation of family allowances today does not mean taking away their universality. Lifting indexation as we wanted to do at the time and on which we reversed our decision as a Government, removing indexation of Old Age Security pensions does not at all mean eliminating the universality of these pensions. It is not the same thing.

Mr. Speaker, I was talking to one of the FQDR clubs. Yes, I am also interested in meeting senior citizens clubs, just as I am interested in meeting people who are on welfare. I said to these people, to some 300 or 350 members of the FQDR, and I wrote to them saying that although it was perhaps not politically advantageous, that I was against indexation. I am against this kind of payment and payment increases which means that next year's has to be indexed to last year's. It does not make sense to run a country like that. And people confuse this with universality, and it is not the same thing at all. These are two entirely different concepts.

Mr. Speaker, I would be attacking universality if I said: I am taking away the Old Age Security pension from people with an income of so much or over. That would be eliminating universality. But when I say I am removing indexation, I am neither removing nor attacking universality. I am not attacking the program's universality. That is what I want to make clear to my hon. friend. I have every respect for his views, and he is entitled to express them. But I feel I have a duty to set the record straight and say that universality is not indexation.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, when I was speaking to the people at the FQDR, I said . . . and there was a Mr. Miron there, whose youngest son had just graduated from university. And I wondered what was more important to Mr. Miron: The fact that he would get a dollar more in Old Age Security