

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 13, 1985

The House met at 11 a.m.

● (1105)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY, S.O. 62—NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION— INDEXATION OF OLD AGE SECURITY PENSIONS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before putting the motion in the name of the Hon. Member for Humber-Port au Port-St. Barbe (Mr. Tobin), since today is the final allotted day, the House will go through the usual procedure to consider and dispose of the supply Bill. In view of recent practice, do Hon. Members agree that copies of the supply Bill be distributed now?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber-Port au Port-St. Barbe) moved:

That this House urges the Government to commit itself now to maintain the present system of full indexation of Old Age Security pensions after January 1, 1986.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by reading this motion to the House slowly because it is not a motion of condemnation or non-confidence. It is not a motion which seeks to draw blood or generate an attack. It is a motion which seeks to right a wrong and do so immediately. The motion reads:

That this House urges the Government to commit itself now to maintain the present system of full indexation of Old Age Security pensions after January 1, 1986.

At the end of the day we shall be calling upon members of every Party, regardless of political stripe, regardless of differences we may have on other matters in this House, to cast a vote to reassure the senior citizens of this country of their security in their old age; to wipe away the kind of uncertainty, worry, indeed quiet desperation which comes to somebody living below the poverty line, sheltered within four walls, with only \$75 or \$80 or \$90 of discretionary spending a month, and who wonders how in the name of God he or she will make ends meet if the Government proceeds. That is all this motion purports to do. I hope Members will find it possible, no matter which side of the House they sit on, to not support a Liberal motion but to support a motion of confidence in the good will and wealth of this country to provide a measure of dignity and fairness to our senior citizens in their old age.

Last night, as I was sitting at home watching the CBC evening news, in particular *The Journal*, I was treated to a discourse by Mr. Douglas Fisher in that segment called *The Last Word*. As everyone in this House knows, in fact as a good many Canadians know, Mr. Fisher is a respected journalist, columnist, and a former NDP Member of Parliament. Last night, as usual, Mr. Fisher was eloquent. He told Canadians essentially that having recently turned 65 years of age he was amazed at the number of small breaks which are offered or afforded to senior citizens. He was amazed that a fair number of goods and services are offered to senior citizens at a discount. He indicated that he personally did not need the breaks and, furthermore, as a recent recipient of the Old Age Security cheque, he was not really all that terribly upset about the Government's proposed deindexing of Old Age Security pension benefits by 3 per cent a year. In fact, he said that outraged opposition Members, be they Liberal or NDP, and others who would protest the cut in the OAS, were not really speaking for him as a senior. He rhetorically asked his listeners, "Are they speaking for you?" I have learned to respect Mr. Fisher's powers of contemplation. He went on to say that he was willing to make a sacrifice for the young people of the country, to help reduce the deficit, to make things better in the future.

● (1110)

I bring Mr. Fisher's comments to the attention of the House because I think those comments symbolize and fairly accurately reflect the narrow thinking that has been done by those who suggest that senior citizens can afford this attack on their security in their old age. While Old Age Security cuts may be acceptable to Mr. Fisher, and it seems even desirable, in economic terms Mr. Fisher has about as much in common with the typical senior citizen of the country as chalk does with cheese. Mr. Fisher does not depend on OAS to pay the rent or to put bread and butter on the table. I believe he draws a very reasonable salary and unless I miss my guess as to his credit, he is probably prepared for that time when he will get tired of political commentary and will retire with an adequate pension plan.

For the majority of senior citizens in the country, the majority of whom live just below or only slightly above the poverty line, an Old Age Security cheque is not a cheque which is left in the desk, forgotten until one can find time to go to the bank and cash it and decide how to invest or spend it. For the majority of senior citizens in the country, an Old Age Security cheque is quite literally the difference between a life with a measure of dignity and humble independence, or the prospect of being a burden on friends and family as they try to make ends meet. For those senior citizens an Old Age Security