

Old Age Security

Mr. Reilly: I may be wasting my time but I have a few minutes in which to do it and very little else to do this evening, so I might as well waste it this way. I would like to give the minister and his accomplices over there a few reminders, going back to 1969 when the Prime Minister discovered inflation. He told us it was the worst problem we had to face. He told us of the people on fixed incomes, how they were suffering, and how he was going to go about easing their plight.

He was warned at the same time by the Economic Council of Canada, which the minister a few minutes ago was so ecstatically quoting, that if he followed the plan he had announced two things would happen. One of them was that inflation would not be beaten, could not be beaten by that plan; and the second thing was that unprecedented unemployment would follow. And they were right. Arthur Smith was right. For his pains he was fired, banished, never to be heard from again.

What did we hear then? As my colleague pointed out a few minutes ago, we heard that inflation was licked. Then it turned out that it wasn't licked. We got a budget that was supposed to solve the whole matter, but it did not.

What happened then? We had a parliamentary committee on prices. What was it able to accomplish? Nothing. Now what do we have? We have the Plumtre committee, whose chairman is a Rockcliffe \$40,000 a year ancient party wheelhorse who, from her mansion up there in the most exclusive part of Ottawa, advised the poor of this country that if they did not like the price of something they saw on the shelves in their grocery stores, not to buy it. A lady called Marie Antoinette gave essentially the same advice to the poor of Paris when they could not afford bread, but at least the people of that day had the wisdom to cut off her head.

An hon. Member: I thought you were against capital punishment.

Mr. Reilly: What we have from the famous Plumtre committee, and it is endorsed by the government, is yet another subsidy. Who is going to pay for that subsidy? One again it will be the middle class, the middle income people who have carried the country on their backs for so long. Because taxes rise inexorably due to things like the Taj Mahal on the Ottawa that the Secretary of State for External Affairs has built himself—Temple Pearson.

The fact of the matter is that we have been through Plan A, Plan B, Plan C and Plan D. And there is an exigency operation, as we all know, an emergency plan in Toronto, covering the printing of food rationing stamps and gasoline rationing stamps. The government has not tried to deny this.

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In fact, the government has failed in its every attempt to cope with the problem of inflation, and now it proposes to give an extra \$5 a month to the pensioners who already cannot properly exist. The minister would not say whether he believed \$340 per month was enough to live on in dignity. I would remind him that in the province of Ontario the minimum wage is \$2 an hour which, translated into a 40-hour week, works out to \$80 a week. Multiplied by four it comes to \$320 per month. That is a good deal

[Mr. Yewchuk.]

more than he proposes to give to the person who has worked all his life, the person who worked at a time when very likely there were no contributory pension plans and whose savings have been eroded to the point where he is lucky if he can exist at all. The minister is proud of the fact that he has raised these pensions above the poverty line. I would not be very proud of that where I the minister.

An hon. Member: You will never be the minister.

Mr. Reilly: I certainly would never be the minister in your outfit. I think the hon. gentlemen over there dined a little too well. They are just clutching their bellies in spasms of uncontrollable mirth at everything I say. To be heckled by the backbench of the Liberal party—

An hon. Member: Is an honour.

Mr. Reilly: —is an honour, you are right. It shows at least that they are listening.

I am not going to make the mistake of asking the minister or any of his colleagues any more questions before I conclude lest the floor be taken away for all time. I will merely conclude by saying that the minister knows full well that, while the purchasing power of the dollar has declined by 50 per cent since his government took power, he also knows full well, but refuses to say that he himself believes, that the figure he offers is not enough to live on in comfort and with dignity. In his moving address in March he told us that he often thought of his own father and mother who had worked hard all their lives. I told him then that I hoped they did not have to exist on the pension he was handing out. He is now handing out another five dollars in the middle of summer. I can only conclude by saying that I hope he is a hell of a lot more generous to them at Christmas than he is in September.

Mr. Macquarrie: Mr. Chairman, I will take the opportunity to close the debate for the official opposition. I have enjoyed hearing the contributions of my colleagues and I hope the minister will pay attention to their good ideas. I enjoyed both interventions by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. I enjoyed seeing the NDP cohabit with the Liberals and compete with the Social Credit party at the same time. That made an interesting exercise.

When I looked at the bill I thought the person who had been a party to the FISP bill in the last Parliament, whom we thought was out of the way, had returned. The bill is incomprehensible. We believe that in some mathematical conjuration we will get an improvement for the senior citizens four times a year, and because we have supreme faith we are supporting the bill.

I have two pieces of advice for the minister. He who presides over more federal-provincial consultations than any other minister, perhaps, in my judgment is ill-advised to waste his time in political tub thumping and criticism of Conservative governments in this country. That is not the way we make a better Canada for the older people of the country who live in all provinces. The better administration of shared programs is not aided by the kind of partisanship that we saw tonight.

Having noted this, and having expressed the faint hope that the minister might take note of what advice was