

Time Allocation

The people on the other side of the House know, and they know full well, that it takes several days of debate in the House of Commons before word filters out across Canada about what is happening. I dare say that right now half of our senior citizens and half of their organizations do not know the extent to which this cutback will affect them through this program of six and five. I see the Minister shaking her head, but it is true. Bill C-131, in spite of the fact that the Government denies it, is lowering the income and placing many people on the poverty line who were not on the poverty line before. That has to be so because this Government is taking away the purchasing power of our senior citizens over the next two years.

It is all very well and good for the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde) to say: "Thank God we will be in the promised world of six and five next year". If we are, the Minister knows the proper person to thank. But I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that we are not in the world of six and five. The rate of inflation in this country is still over 10 per cent. It is still in the two-digit range.

Our senior citizens who are at or near the poverty line will have less purchasing power, which will place more and more of them on the poverty line or below. It is that group of people who are near that line who will be so seriously affected by this Bill.

This Bill does attack the universality of the old age pension scheme, which is the basic support for our senior citizens. Several Members have commented on this in the past few days and it really is the only remark that upsets the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin). The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Schroder), in a most incredible statement when he was reading his speech a few moments ago, probably written by department officials, said that perhaps we should consider that we should not speak in this House unless we can improve on silence. I suggest that is why over the two and a half days of debate only five Members from the Liberal Party have spoken. Obviously, they thought they could not improve on silence.

This Government has spoken about pension reform. The Minister has travelled across the country. I suspect she has spoken in every major city in Canada about pension reform. She advised us today that we will have some indication of what pension reform is all about in the near future. But let us take a look at the record of this Government, a Government that refuses to allow us to debate this issue so that the people of Canada will know what this Government is doing to its senior citizens.

In this Government's budget, the first thing the Liberals did was to penalize our senior citizens in terms of their savings and investments. The Government followed that with Bill C-131 and what it proposed to do via Bill C-133. This Government has done nothing to improve the status of pensioners in this country. I think our senior citizens should know that and we in this House should be allowed to inform them. It would be a far different thing if the pension system were in trouble.

Certainly if this Government, like some other governments in the world, the United States in particular, were having real problems with the social security system, I am sure that Members in this House would co-operate in finding ways to finance what is an ailing system. For instance, our Canada Pension Plan is in trouble now. You can rest assured, Mr. Speaker, that we will give this Government the co-operation it needs to improve that system. But the basic support system for the aged is not in trouble. The OAS is working perfectly well. It is the kind of income support that any country would be proud to give their senior citizens.

This leads me to ask this Government and this Minister, why are they attacking this system? We recognize there is a demographic problem, but that did not affect Old Age Security assistance. We recognize that inflation is a problem in this country. But surely a government that spends money the way this Government has cannot place its problems on the backs of our senior citizens.

Let us look at what this Government has done. It has spent \$13.7 million on Bombardier by way of guarantees. This Government has made a \$200 million loan guarantee to Chrysler; there is a \$500 million investment for Dome Petroleum; a \$34 million debt guarantee for de Havilland; a \$125 million guarantee to Massey-Ferguson; and a \$20 million investment in Minaki Lodge. What about its recently set-up Crown Corporation of which this Government is so proud? I am referring, of course, to Petro-Canada, which is paying \$18,000 a day in rent for empty space in Calgary. But now this Government is saying that it needs to fight inflation on the backs of the elderly.

My colleagues and I will continue to oppose closure on Bill C-131 as long as we are able. We will continue to oppose the Bill itself because it is highly unjust to the senior citizens of our country.

• (1630)

Mr. Hal Herbert (Vaudreuil): Mr. Speaker—

Mrs. Mitchell: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder about the sequence of speakers. We have had three from each side—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The sequence of speakers has been observed scrupulously.

Mr. Herbert: Mr. Speaker, I want to stick fairly rigidly to the subject of the motion, which does not concern the subject matter of Bill C-131.

I am a member of the Committee which has been reviewing the regulations of this House of Commons. One of the matters that we have discussed is the problem of getting legislation out of the House. The Members of the Opposition Parties that are represented on that Committee recognize that the Government has a right to govern, and the Members of the Government Party on that Committee recognize that the Opposition has a right to oppose.