

Government Orders

"this House declines to give second reading to Bill C-54, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act, the Canada Pension Plan, the Children's Special Allowances Act and the Unemployment Insurance Act, because it does not provide a penalty under the Criminal Code for the disclosure of personal information concerning beneficiaries to persons who are not legally authorized to such information pursuant to Access to Privileged Information."

Mr. Patrick Gagnon (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would, in fact, have a few questions to ask the hon. member. He mentioned the average amounts paid to senior citizens as compared to the national average in Canada. When he mentions \$25,000 and \$19,000 are these gross or net amounts?

Mr. Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe, B.Q.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine did not listen carefully to my speech, because I made it very clear that these figures were for net incomes.

Mr. Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, if that is their net income, their gross income must be around \$35,000 or nearly \$40,000. The average income of a family of four is almost \$45,000. Therefore, those individual incomes are way above the national average for a family of four.

At any rate, I want to make one thing one thing clear. This government has no intention of tampering with old age security. All Liberal governments, and especially the present one, have always preserved the vested rights of senior citizens, and more particularly those received or accrued by people who have been contributing for at least 50 years. Through their contribution, they shaped Canada as we know it today. Everybody recognizes, as well as I do, the great efforts made by our senior citizens. Believe me, we are the first ones to look after the have-nots.

Once again, I hope the hon. member of the opposition understands there are 800,000 people on welfare or unemployment insurance in Quebec. All kinds of suggestions are being made to meet the needs of Quebecers and make our economy more efficient and create more jobs. But all I hear in this House is a condemnation of the government of Canada. I will send the ball back in his court and ask him, for example, what the experts did at the regional level.

In this matter, I listened to Quebec's Minister of Health who still has not made a decision on the problem of medical specialists who are needed in outlying regions. Pensioners come and see me to say that they need specialists. We have hospitals in Maria, Chandler and Gaspé. But no. Quebec's civil servants prefer to send them to Rimouski, Quebec City or even Montreal. Unfortunately, the Government of Quebec does not often respond to my constituents' real requests for social services and health services. Of course, this is provincial jurisdiction, but I say that it is wrong to blame the federal government, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, what do we hear very often? That it is the Government of Quebec, the member's head office, which does not meet Quebecers' real expectations and needs.

• (1235)

Mr. Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe, B.Q.): Mr. Speaker, the member has a short memory. I think he cannot see past the tip of his nose. I must remind the member that the Parti Québécois government was elected only a few weeks ago and that, for the past ten years, it was his Liberal friends in Quebec who had been managing the health care system.

I would like to remind the member, who does not seem to be too firmly grounded in reality, that money you have to live on is not what appears on paper but what you have left in your hand. With an income of \$25,000, I say that you live in poverty. If the member looked at the government's statistics, he would know that with \$25,000 you are in dire straits. Many times, when you are paying for your groceries, you wonder if you should not put an item back on the shelf because you do not know if you are going to have enough money to pay the bill.

The money in your hand is a far cry from what appears on paper. When the amount on paper is \$50,000 and you are left with only \$25,000, it is because the government took the other \$25,000. This is what it means.

Does the member realize that, while there are 800,000 unemployed people, his government has just taken some extraordinary steps cutting social programs and training, and that the Minister of Human Resources Development has just announced an astounding proposal asking students to get deeper into debt, under the pretence of making it easier to have access to training? What the minister is telling university and post-secondary students is this: "We are giving you better access to funding from banks and credit unions so that you can get deeper into debt and we are cutting grants and bursaries". We know very well that to get a bachelor's degree now, a student piles up a debt of about \$9,000 or \$10,000.

A student who goes as far as the doctoral or post-doctoral level leaves university \$40,000 in debt. That is what your government is doing!

That government is doing nothing to stimulate employment. They invested in infrastructure, which is not a bad program, as everyone admits, except where do young people get jobs in the infrastructure program? Where do women find work in the infrastructure projects? Nothing, zero.

The Prime Minister said that when we see trucks rolling in the streets, the economic recovery will be under way. That is a very short-sighted way to look at economic recovery and it is especially short-sighted to think that you will put people back to work just by digging in the streets. It is an old, well-known model that works in some ways, but they did not think of training. They did not think of investing in young entrepreneurs. What the government is doing is the opposite of what it