

Time Allocation

very small sacrifice, less than 50 cents per month, for other pensioners in Canada who are not receiving the supplement.

Although it is obvious the Bill contains very clear assurances to that effect, Opposition Members who spoke to the Bill generally had a list of horror stories that were supposed to result from this legislation. They mentioned elderly Canadians who would be losing their homes or their apartments, or would be forced to move because they would no longer be able to pay the rent, and so on. Some stories were even more dramatic. All this cannot be taken seriously. It is very easy to get public sympathy for the problems of the elderly, but it is a little harder to convince people who do not need the supplement that 50 cents less per month per cheque will mean that they are going to lose their homes or will have to move elsewhere. This is the kind of exaggeration that has lost the Progressive Conservatives, especially, their credibility in this debate. They did all this in letters to senior citizens' clubs and in paragraphs published in the parliamentary bulletin which they can get free since it is paid for by the House of Commons; they can send it to their constituents, and describe the so-called horrors and catastrophic consequences of this Bill.

The fact remains that the pensions of all senior citizens who do have alternate sources of income have been increased. People received their pension cheques about a week ago and they got \$3.70 more. Furthermore, only about 50 cents will be subtracted, once the Bill is passed, from the cheques of those who do not need the supplement. I know that for some people this is a lot, and that every cent counts. I know, especially in the case of senior citizens who are just above the cut-off point and are therefore not eligible for the supplement. I think we are all quite aware of this, but the decision we have to make is not about the cheque for February or March, but the increasing lifespan of each of these senior citizens, and what they will need to live on.

I have been Minister of National Health and Welfare for only five years, but during that time, I have seen indexing increase rapidly from year to year. This year, if the predictions made in June were correct and remain consistent, we would probably have had to give something like 11 per cent. Well we were lucky, because since June, since that Budget, the average inflation rate has dropped to 7.6 per cent. But am I doing senior citizens a favour by giving them an 11-per-cent indexation? No. Indexation is not an increase, it is only a way to maintain the value of the dollar. So—

● (1510)

[English]

I would just like to remind all Hon. Members that this Bill would do the most, in the long run, for senior citizens as well as all other Canadians, in winning the six and five battle against inflation.

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you have noticed that just about every time a Liberal Cabinet Minister stands up these days, it is to

impose closure. That seems to be the major reason for their being in the House, to enforce closure on one piece of legislation or another. Closure has indeed become such a commonplace procedure with the Government that we now actually expect, each parliamentary week, to start out with a closure motion, a Government motion to limit debate, such as we have seen concerning Bill C-131. This is legislation which is aimed against the senior citizens of Canada.

I was interested to hear this afternoon that the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) had so convoluted her argument that she has now convinced herself that this Bill will be of benefit to the senior citizens of Canada. She said: "This will benefit them". I would like her to go out and actually speak with some of the senior citizens of this country.

The Bill will reduce the income which hundreds of thousands of senior citizens would have received had this piece of legislation not been introduced. At second reading we had 17 hours of debate on the Bill. That is less than three days in the House of Commons to consider what the Government is doing to senior citizens. At that time, a number of Hon. Members spoke. Fourteen Liberal Members rose to speak in praise of the Bill. They agreed with the punitive measures being taken by the Government against citizens in this country. Twenty-three Conservatives and eight New Democratic Members opposed it, as it ought to be opposed.

In committee we had only four sessions to hear witnesses. Every single witness and every group and organization appearing before us, crowded into those four sessions, violently and strenuously opposed the measures in the Bill. Therefore, after condensed committee hearings and limited debate at second reading, we now come back to the House for report stage, the stage at which important amendments can be introduced and when the Government can perhaps be persuaded to modify this punitive legislation, and when it might also be persuaded of the error of its ways.

However, what has happened? Even before we reached report stage, even before we had a chance to introduce amendments and debate them, the Government moved to cut off debate, to limit it. It does not want to hear arguments against this atrocious piece of legislation and obviously does not want to consider any measure whatsoever which could possibly improve it. Therefore, once again this House faces closure. Once again, the heavy hand of the Government sweeps down to cast aside all opposition to its point of view. Once again, any semblance of respect for the principles of our parliamentary system, parliamentary democracy, is just scattered to the four winds.

This is not a new spectacle. Certainly, it is not a new spectacle as far as the Government is concerned and it is not a new experience for the House or, indeed, for the Canadian people. We are becoming very well acquainted with the Government's methods, its manipulations and its use of closure over and over again. Over and over again, it seeks to enforce its will by the imposition of silence, because it fears the expression of debate.