

Old Age Security Act (No. 2)

The Hon. Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) said that seniors were losing something like \$300. I would like to make it clear that that is total misinformation. I want to repeat that all senior citizens who have no or little income apart from their basic pension will not be affected by this Bill. I also want to say to those seniors who will be affected by this Bill in small amounts that we will not be collecting back any money on the January cheque which was fully indexed. We will not collect back any money.

Hon. Members opposite have attempted to make Canadians believe that these measures are dismantling the improvements that have been made through the decades to the pension system. That is not true. These charges are false. What is worse, they serve only to create unwarranted anxiety among the elderly.

We know the political game played in this Chamber by every Member in the two Opposition Parties, who always accuse us of being terrible villains. That is the game played in the House. But, when those Members go outside and, instead of quoting figures of \$18 in total loss for this year and \$39 for next year, they quote figures like \$300, they are not damaging us, since we were elected by a majority and we will pass this Bill. They are damaging Mrs. X and Mr. Y, who are at home watching on TV and do not know the real figures. They suddenly become nervous about losing \$300. That figure is false. This Bill does not do that at all.

I would like to reply to Members who think that we are doing terrible things to the pension system. I say to those Hon. Members and all Canadians that I am very proud that we have kept the social programs the way they are. Last week, we all watched television when President Reagan delivered a State of the Union message in which he outlined a four-part plan to increase growth and reduce deficits. Who is going to pay the bill? He cited what he termed the need to reduce, and I quote, "the dangerous growth rate in government spending". Where did he find the money? He called for a six-month freeze in the cost of living adjustment—that means zero growth—for government-related pension programs. He spoke of cutting back on food stamps and other such social programs. In addition, he proposed asking the elderly to pay more for medicare.

• (1115)

The United States is not alone in doing that to social programs. In West Germany, Chancellor Helmut Kohl has proposed to delay statutory cost of living increases in old age pensions due in January until July, at which time pensioners will also be required to pay health insurance contributions.

I could go on and on giving examples of other measures that have taken place. In France, for example, people will have to pay for medicare.

An Hon. Member: We are in Canada.

Miss Bégin: Yes, we are in Canada. Hon. Members opposite are not telling the truth to the people, and that is why I have to remind them, and the people, of what other countries have

decided on their social programs. Mr. Speaker, members opposite say to the Canadian people that we are dismantling the social programs. I am proving the contrary to them with facts—they never like to hear facts—and with quotations on things that can be verified about what is happening elsewhere.

We are not dismantling the program in Canada; we are making sure that seniors get the full value of their dollar in their pension. We are doing that by a national campaign of 6 and 5 per cent, which is working. That is why Hon. Members opposite are so furious and the proof of that is in many of their speeches. They ask, "If it is such a success, why do it?" Well, Mr. Speaker, if we do not do it, it will stop being a success. Members do not seem to realize the psychological dimension of the economic cycle.

In short, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that social welfare spending is under attack in most countries of the western world. But this country has respected its basic commitments and pensioners will not be subjected to the sorts of draconian measures that the elderly in many other countries are now facing. Bill C-131 safeguards the principles of both universality and indexation.

Despite the laughter from the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, I should like to finish my remarks by inviting all Hon. Members to support the bill. The faster we reduce inflation, the sooner all Canadians, especially pensioners, those on fixed incomes, will benefit.

Mr. Orlikow: Madam Speaker, I should like to ask a question of the Minister. She says that this program is working and is not going to hurt pensioners. Using her own figures, the fact is that the cost of living is still increasing by well over 9 per cent while the capping of indexing means that old age pensioners will get an increase of only 6 per cent. If the figures mean anything, that means that the old age pensioners' real income will be reduced by 3 per cent. How can the minister say that they are not suffering?

Let me ask one other question, Mr. Speaker. The Minister also says that we have not cut back on our social security programs, but we see more and more doctors opting out of medicare and hospitalization plans and we see more and more Provinces putting deterrent fees on hospitalization. How can the Minister then say that we are not cutting back on social security?

Miss Bégin: Mr. Speaker, I am going to repeat emphatically that in Canada the social programs are well maintained and that, through medicare, Canadians have the best health system in the western world—I can say in all the world. I believe that. It is not often that Canadians can say that we are the best, but in this case we have the best. We are not cutting down on payments because all Provinces and the feds are putting more money into medicare this year than last year, and so on and so forth for every coming year. The Hon. Member is really oversimplifying a more complicated problem. It does not have anything to do with cuts.