

Old Age Security Act

It is true, Mr. Speaker, but it is also true that contrary to the remarks of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) on February 19 last, the government—contributing to inflation—found enough millions, even billions of dollars to increase substantially its operating expenses. For instance, the estimates of the Department of National Defence rose from \$1.933,8 billion in 1972-73 to \$2.135,5 billion in 1973-74.

Since defence has come up, Mr. Speaker, I trust that these increased estimates do not contain another *Bras d'Or* or another *Bonaventure*, of illustrious memory.

Under the heading of general internal expenditure, Mr. Speaker, we also find a \$190 million grant for culture and recreation, which is an increase of \$11 million.

Under what they call foreign affairs, the sum has mushroomed from \$387,200,000 to \$426,600,000.

Under these five major headings alone, the budget estimates have gone up by over \$500 million, and the overall budget estimates for 1973-74 are several billion dollars higher than those for 1972-73.

What effort has been made to limit expenditure? None whatever. This is administrative irresponsibility. I therefore find it hard to take when a member of the cabinet, even though he is the Minister of National Health and Welfare, comes here and talks about caution in the use of public money.

It is high time, Mr. Speaker, that the federal government set the example for provinces and municipalities that have not yet put their financial houses in order. But we all know that the present government, caring little about that ideal, is slow to heed the advice of even the Auditor General. Thus, Mr. Speaker, this argument about the limits of public funds, however true in itself, carries little weight coming from the present government.

• (1240)

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, when the hon. member for Don Valley (Mr. Gillies) made it clear that a Stanfield government would have used a two-pronged approach of increased expansionary budgeting with a temporary across-the-board freeze, many on the other side called this approach irresponsible and simplistic. Had the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) been here throughout the speech by the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie), he would have seen further evidence of the way in which the government has missed the boat in terms of an economic policy which had truly beneficial implications in the area of social legislation.

Parliament will pass this bill. Yet while we debate here today we have little or no control over those forces which may now be working to relieve the pensioners of Canada of whatever increases we are endeavouring to approve in this parliament. How many pensioners living in nursing homes will find their monthly or annual rates increased just about the time they receive their first augmented cheques? How many will find the rents for their rooms or apartments going up in May? How many will experience the frustration of finally getting a raise only to see it fall into someone else's hands?

[Mr. Wagner.]

Members of this House are aware that the issue of rents is a provincial one. Nevertheless, the 60-90 day freeze would have given the federal government an opportunity to begin discussions with the provinces which could have led to some real restraint being imposed on rent increases. In my own province of Quebec, the government has already acted in a retroactive way to hold down unreasonable rent increases. The federal government has received, to my knowledge, no negative indications from any province with regard to co-operation in this field. The lack of a two-pronged approach in overall budgetary policy is now emerging as a major obstacle to any real social impact being produced in consequence of the increase we are discussing today. Indeed, it seems fair to conclude that this omission on the part of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) will serve to cripple and undercut many programs and approaches planned by the government in the future.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, this government keeps purposely to the *status quo* as regards the structure of the old age security plan. The government members will not recognize the needs of a pensioner's spouse, who would be less than 65 years old. Those same government members also close the door against all requests concerning the age of eligibility under the Canada Pension Plan. Now there are 786,000 Canadians between 60 to 64 and the only short-term comfort being offered to 64-year-old people—there are 171,000 of them—is the need for a preliminary and thorough study of an over-all social security policy, with the co-operation of the provinces.

That any matter related to the formulation and objectives of and the responsibility for a social security policy should be a subject of intensive exchanges with provincial governments, we agree to that, because that is real federalism, a federalism that is justified. But that has always been true.

Has this government only discovered since its licking of last October 30, that there are provinces and that those provinces have their own responsibilities and priorities?

What was this government doing at the height of its majority, from 1968 to 1972?

We know what it was doing and that is why, among other things, it was practically defeated on October 30. It was arrogant then, showing no flexibility at all, having no real dialogue with the provinces.

And now this government which was rejected by a great number of Canadians on October 30 is acting the same way towards older people.

Older people in general, especially those between 60 and 64, are paying today the price or part of the price of the arrogance shown by the Liberal government over the four last years.

Incidentally, if the Liberal government, its mandarins and some gray eminence, at the time he had the upper hand in the Prime Minister's office, had not been so arrogant with the provinces from 1968 to 1972, a certain Quebec nationalist movement would not now have so much power in direct political action.