

Private Members' Business

PAIRED—MEMBERS

Bergeron	Copps
Goodale	Gray (Windsor West)
Jacob	Leblanc (Longueuil)
Marchi	Marleau
Paré	Pomerleau
Robichaud	Rocheleau
Rompkey	Stewart (Northumberland)
Tremblay (Rosemont)	Venne

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed.)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): It being 5.47 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

SENIORS—REDUCTION OF AGE CREDIT

Mr. Jean-Paul Marchand (Québec-Est) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should withdraw the measure to reduce the age credit that it introduced in its most recent budget, and retain the Old Age Security Program and the Canada Pension Plan in their present forms.

He said: Mr. Speaker, Motion M-289 which I am presenting in this House today brings out the expectations of seniors throughout the country. Groups of seniors from Vanier, Les Saules, Limoilou, Neufchâtel, Ancienne-Lorette and Duberger in my riding told me about their concerns for the future and I fully share these concerns in light of recent events.

The present Liberal government displays a serious lack of social equity and economic justice. Instead of reducing its shameless waste and administrative duplication or even requiring the 90,000 corporations that do not pay tax to contribute their fair share, the government is attacking the poor, the middle class, the disadvantaged, the unemployed and the elderly.

On the pretext of reducing its deficit, the Liberal government is attacking defenceless groups in society which are already in a precarious financial situation, because these Liberals are a heartless government.

In the last budget, we saw how \$5.5 billion was taken from the unemployed in unemployment insurance programs. We just voted on this measure in this House.

As for seniors, the first thing the government did in this same budget was to reduce the age credit. I say the first thing the government did because other equally harmful measures were introduced and are still to come from the Liberal government.

The age credit reduced federal income tax by about \$610 a year for all taxable seniors. The amendment reduces this credit by 15 per cent for all seniors whose taxable income exceeds \$25,921 and it is totally eliminated for incomes over \$49,100.

Thus the Liberal government intends to save \$490 million by 1997 on the backs of seniors. Across the country, 800,000 seniors will be affected by this measure. Does the Liberal government consider that an elderly person with an annual income of \$25,000 is a rich taxpayer? Does it consider that with such an amount, which is barely above the poverty level, that person must still give money to the government, after having paid taxes throughout his life and working hard to be able to enjoy a modest income in his retirement years?

The federal government did not stop there as regards cuts made at the expense of seniors. Its latest idea is to set up a centralized answering machine system using voice boxes to answer queries from seniors. This dehumanization of services to the elderly is simply pitiful!

The idea is simple. Offices serving seniors in Val d'Or, Chicoutimi, Gatineau, Rimouski, Sherbrooke, Drummondville, Trois-Rivières and Sept-Îles will be closed. The number of agents in Quebec City will be considerably reduced, since at least 123 of the current 347 positions across the province will be abolished.

In fact, the number of jobs eliminated could reach 50 per cent of the current strength and all these positions will be replaced by a single telephone exchange in Montreal, a recorded questionnaire for touch-tone telephones for seniors across the province.

• (1755)

From now on, the elderly will talk to a pre-recorded voice. They will talk to a machine to get the information they need. To make things worse, if the lines are overloaded at the Montreal exchange, the calls will be transferred to another province. Is this not a perfect example of how the government holds our elderly in contempt? We can easily imagine the numerous problems which they will encounter with this new system. Indeed, problems related to hearing, eyesight and dexterity are common occurrences in that age group. Talking to a machine will create unavoidable difficulties for seniors. How will they be able to ask that machine to explain something they do not understand? How will they be able to explain particular circumstances? How can the machine understand all the subtleties of a case and know in which category to find the information required by the person?

Such recordings are already being used in several locations and they never provide the information required. I myself have a lot of problems with the touch-tone system requiring you to press one for English, two for French, three for general informa-