

Supplementary Retirement Benefits Act (No. 2)

It is true that the Progressive Conservatives are opposing Bill C-131 and Bill C-133. I believe most of them are doing this out of political expediency because they are afraid to face the legitimate wrath of old age pensioners and Public Service pensioners, and because they do not want to be seen to be in bed with the Liberals. They would prefer the lights to be out all the time, Mr. Speaker, as they were for a short moment today, so that their relationship with the Liberals would be less visible. Only a few of them genuinely disapprove of these measures, and they are well-known to the House. I congratulate them for that disapproval.

The fact of the matter is that the Conservative Party has supported the six and five program in principle since the beginning.

An Hon. Member: For people who are working, sure.

Mr. Blaikie: This last summer they voted overwhelmingly in favour of the initial and most all-encompassing of the six and five Bills, Bill C-124. Had they helped the NDP to oppose that particular Bill, instead of giving aid and comfort to the Liberals, we might not have ever been faced with Bill C-131 and Bill C-133.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Blaikie: So I repeat the charge that my Conservative colleagues are trying to have it both ways on this issue by supporting the program in general, but then pretending to oppose it in particular, when there is a subsequent Bill which is part of the over-all program.

I maintain that the Liberals have acted so confidently to reduce indexation of pensions and Family Allowances because they correctly judged that the Official Opposition, the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, would offer only token resistance to such moves.

An Hon. Member: They made a deal with them.

Mr. Blaikie: Why? Why only token resistance? Because the six and five program is consistent with the general view of the Progressive Conservative Party about what needs to be done in order to produce renewed economic growth in Canada, and because the Conservative Party of Canada has a long tradition, broken only to an extent by John Diefenbaker, of having a negative rather than a positive attitude toward pensions and toward other universal programs like Family Allowance and Medicare. Indeed, when the Old Age Security payment first came into being in 1927, it was over the objections of the Conservative Party of Canada. Many Conservatives at that time seemed to think it would be vaguely immoral to do what that terrible radical, J. S. Woodsworth, was proposing, and have a means-tested pension of \$20 per month for every Canadian over 70 years of age. To most of the Conservatives of that time, Mr. Speaker, that smacked of communism, the same kind of rhetoric that we hear so often from the benches to my right, even to this very day.

• (2050)

No group of people involved in politics in the last decade or so has done more to discredit the Public Service and universal social programs than the official spokespeople of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada. The PCs have allowed Members of their Party, and I think of the Hon. Member for York-Peel (Mr. Stevens) as an example, to go around the country denouncing the public sector, blaming spending on social programs for all our economic ills, and arguing against the indexation of pensions as something we cannot afford and should not do. Yet tonight they are full of praise and compassion for the retirement incomes of the people who are retired from the very kinds of jobs that they wanted to cut by 60,000 in August 1979, according to an announcement made then by the Member for York-Peel when he was president of the treasury board in the short-lived Progressive Conservative Government in 1979. This is the kind of inconsistency to which we have been treated by the PCs in this debate on Bill C-133.

Tonight the Conservatives are great defenders of universal old age pensions and Family Allowances, but it was the PC minister of national health and welfare, the Hon. Member for Rosedale (Mr. Crombie), who in 1979 clearly was interested, indeed fascinated, with the arguments being advanced by his right-wing colleagues that the time had come to ditch the universal programs. I remember only too well his hedging on the future of universal programs like the Family Allowance when I asked him a question in the House of Commons on that issue as social policy critic for my caucus in that Parliament of 1979.

The general point I am trying to make is that the six and five program, in so far as it is presented as part of an over-all economic strategy, is exactly what the Conservatives have been advocating for years as a way of accommodating the Canadian economy to the changes which are taking place in the international structure of capitalism. As we move into the era of the consolidation of the power of global corporations and out of the era of national corporations, and before that family corporations, we are going to have to decide how we are going to deal with the mobility of capital that is now characteristic of the economic context in which we live.

The Conservatives in their own way have already faced up to this issue and they found it very easy. Because they worship market forces as the ultimate arbiter of human needs and human destiny, they seem to have decided some time ago that the Canadian response to this new reality should be not to question this mobility of capital and the reality of internationalization of capital, but to shape our own country in such a way as to make ourselves acceptable to the profit aspirations of these global corporations.

Capitulation and abandonment of the well-being of Canada is the only option available to those who worship the idol of free enterprise. The Liberals, of course, worship only power. Seeing as they cannot be guaranteed hanging on to power if they act in the long-term interests of the country instead of the short-term interests of their own political fortunes, they have