

Old Age Security Act

wish to emphasize at the start, and I do so because I have sufficient mail to tell me this is the way our senior citizens are feeling, is that there is great disappointment—not anger, perhaps; not political comment, but just heartbroken disappointment—that this is being done to them.

Some people not only write the letters directly to me; they send me copies of letters they have written to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) or to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro). I liked one which came to my notice the other day—maybe the minister recalls receiving it. The correspondent asks him: “How could you let anyone overrule your own heart and better judgment on this?” I have a pretty good idea who that someone was, but I cite this letter not to make that allusion but rather to emphasize the mood, the thinking, of our senior citizens.

You see, we must take into account not only the 510,000 who will not get a supplement but are in brackets where they need every extra cent they can get, but the whole group, the whole 1,700,000, as well as the younger people who are interested in their parents and grandparents. All are disappointed that this division into two groups is being made.

The second feeling I detect in the heavy correspondence I receive on this question is, perhaps, not far removed from disappointment, but I sense it as something different—it is disillusion. It is very real, and some of it is angry. They ask: How can parliament do this to us, a Parliament which entered into a social contract to provide that all future pensions would be escalated? I will provide quotations in support of this, in a moment or two. They ask: How can you break that contract?

There is another point which has been turning up in my letters, especially in the last two or three days. I shall not dwell on it, because I do not want to get off the track or annoy the very people to whom I am addressing my plea. But hon. members must know that people are saying: How can parliament ask old age pensioners to settle for one last increase of 42 cents a month and then receive a report which proposes some rather magnanimous increases as far as Members of Parliament themselves are concerned? This is in addition to what we did with respect to our own pensions only a few months ago, and remember that our pensions, like civil service pensions, will still escalate by 2 per cent a year. There is disillusionment about Parliament. Safe and secure as I believe this institution to be, Mr. Speaker, we must not press our luck too far; we must not gamble too much on the respect people have for this institution. If we do too many things which make people feel we are concerned primarily with ourselves and certain other interests, and not concerned about keeping our word to the old people of this country or with other groups which are not the subject of the debate this afternoon, this disillusionment could put Parliament in a bad way. My plea for the support of these motions is as strong and as earnest as I can make it, and I am making it now for the sake of Parliament itself. People write to me and say: You can't do this to us; the government cannot act this

way; it is not like Parliament. Let us prove to them that we do not act that way.

• (3:40 p.m.)

I know the odds I am facing today. We had two or three votes in the standing committee on the very clauses that are before the House in these two motions, and we lost those votes on a division of something like 9 to 4 in both cases. All of the Liberals present voted to go along with discontinuing the escalation of the basic old age pension; my friends in the Conservative party and my colleague from Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis) and I, representing our party on the committee, voted of course, to continue the escalation. Unfortunately, my friends to my far left in this chamber were not present at the time, although I am sure they would have voted that way as well.

The point I want to make is this: I know this is a bill in the government's name, that the government is backing the bill. Its backbenchers backed the bill in committee. But this is still Parliament. It is still a place where speeches are made and listened to, arguments are considered and individual members make up their minds.

I say to every member of this House who is sending Christmas greetings back home wishing a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to his constituents, just don't bother if you are going to contribute to the disillusionment of people by telling them: “Oh yes, we told you a few years ago that all future pensions would be escalated, but the government has now changed its mind and so we backbench supporters of the government are going to go along with the government”. As a lover of Parliament I plead that this not be done. I am sure there are just as many lovers of Parliament in the other parties as there are in mine. Let this be shown today when the vote comes on these two motions.

The third point I wish to make hinges on the word “equity”. You cannot justify a scheme under which you divide our senior citizens into two groups, with one group getting the old age pension escalation when the cost of living increases, the other group not. It is no use the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro) telling me that we are redirecting our money so that the poor get it. We went over this the other day. I still contend that all that we are doing is redistributing poverty. We are not imposing any new taxes on those of us still in our working years; this will all be paid for out of the old age security fund. What we are doing is taking \$1.17 a month away from 510,000 people—there are more than that, but they are the ones in the middle bracket—and giving it to some other elderly people, starting in January.

There are a number of ways in which I might try to demonstrate the inequity of this. I have done some figuring, and at one point I thought of giving half a dozen examples. I have decided to give just one because I think it tells the story of inequity very clearly. I hope hon. members listen to this set of figures that I will now put on the record; they are not too involved and I am sure will be readily comprehended.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]