

Supply

Mr. Caccia: Mr. Speaker, all that I can say in reply to the Hon. Member is that judging from the length of his intervention in which he devoted himself only to one subject, he seems to be more interested in the petroleum industry than senior citizens.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Questions or comments?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Bertrand: Mr. Speaker, I have no intention whatsoever of trying to score political points in this debate. I sincerely believe that there is nothing meaner in a difficult situation than to try to make political hay out of the plight of the weakest and poorest in our society.

But I just cannot understand, and I even think it is indecent on the part of the Opposition to attempt to lecture us under these circumstances. I am thinking about some of them, not necessarily the lesser luminaries of that Party. Among others, I have in mind the former Minister of National Health and Welfare, Miss Bégin, who said this in December 1982: "The Government intends to amend these laws after carefully considering the situation and because it realizes that all Canadians must be prepared to make sacrifices to fight inflation and ensure our economic recovery". Nobody was even talking about creating jobs then. Miss Bégin went on to say: "Reduce the indexation of benefits to senior citizens who do not need the guaranteed income supplement. They were asked to make the same sacrifice as other Canadians." It was Miss Bégin who then expected that from the elderly.

She added: "Most Canadian men and women are now faced with a new economic reality. The only way to solve our problems is to take drastic measures to reduce inflation. Canadians in every walk of life have to adjust to that situation, however difficult it may be, so that they will not be up against harsher consequences in the future".

Here are the comments at this time of Mr. Johnston, today's finance critic: "The problem raised by the Budget deficit is serious and must not be overlooked. It could lead to a loss of confidence and jeopardize other necessary measures. That is why we must never miss an opportunity to reduce it". And then, further on: "We hope that when they debate these crucial problems in this time of serious crisis the Members of the House will demonstrate that they understand the significance and the general characteristic of this problem. This is not the time to make speeches to gain short-term political benefits even if some prospects—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Order, please. I apologize for interrupting the Parliamentary Secretary, but I would simply remind her that we are still in the questions and comments period. I may have misled her when I gave her the floor, but we are still in the questions and comments period.

Mrs. Bertrand: Those were comments, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Perhaps I might remind Hon. Members that questions and comments are allowed during the questions and comments period but, as much as possible, comments ought to be reasonably short so that the person to whom they are directed might reply.

This remark is for the benefit of all Members of the House.

I will allow the Parliamentary Secretary to complete her comments.

Mrs. Bertrand: Well, I will conclude, Mr. Speaker. The then Opposition finance critic said: The national interest requires a national approach to this problem.

Mr. Caccia: Mr. Speaker, very briefly, I want to thank the Parliamentary Secretary and inform her that we are talking about the policy for 1985, not 1982. There really is a tremendous ideological and philosophical difference between her party's approach to controlling the deficit and mine. The Progressive Conservative Party seems to think, indeed it has high hopes of reducing the deficit through cutbacks and controlling the deficit at the expense of senior citizens. We believe that to reduce the deficit, we must develop and strengthen the economy, and as the Government's revenue increases we can gradually start reducing the deficit. That is the difference between the Progressive Conservatives and the Liberals, Mr. Speaker.

[*English*]

Mr. Hockin: Mr. Speaker, I have a short but strongly-felt question for the Hon. Member. Does the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) believe that the effort of the Government to extend pensions to low-income widows and widowers between the age of 60 and 64; that tripling of the number of persons eligible to claim deductions for disability; that the pension reforms that were brought in through earlier vesting and portability and that more fair RRSP contributions will have significant impact immediately and in the future for the security of our senior Canadians?

Mr. Caccia: The Hon. Member for London West (Mr. Hockin) will remember that while we supported the concept, we wanted it expanded to include the single widows and widowers in that age group and we felt that the measure was not comprehensive enough. However, we on this side of the House have a rather long standing tradition and history of building up the social security system of this country.

We really have nothing to learn from the Progressive Conservative Party. If anything, we would urge the Progressive Conservative Party to stop fighting the deficit on the backs of the pensioners, as this measure does in its present form, but to build the system further, strengthen it and reduce the retirement age gradually from 65 to 60 to provide an even better future for our pensioners so that we can be proud of our social security because it is a measure and a mirror of the quality of our society.