

to raise families. They should not have to be faced with this situation now they are in their later years.

As we have all said, our senior citizens are the people who have contributed their labour to Canada. They own a share of the resources of this country. They raised families. They contributed leadership. They deserve a full pension with full indexing.

I would like to remind the Government that we oppose this Bill because it does not make financial sense. It takes away close to \$400 from senior citizens because their pensions are being reduced, but it will do nothing to create jobs. I think the net saving is about \$84 million, a very minimal amount of money when you consider how other expenditures are being allocated in our federal budget, Mr. Speaker. Some alone was given \$500 million. There are many other expenditures which could have been cut that would have created much less hardship for the people who are the victims of inflation and who are now being made the victims of the Government's restraint program.

● (1210)

Finally, we oppose this Bill because we strongly believe, as do many of the groups who presented briefs to the Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs, that the Bill represents a means of eroding the universality of social programs. In this case, it is old age pensions. We believe this to be the case no matter how strongly the Minister denies it. This is a regressive measure.

We know that the Liberal Cabinet, the Minister of Finance in particular, tried very hard last summer to do away with universal old age pensions and Family Allowances. I would remind those Hon. Members opposite that it was Liberals across the country who protested very strongly against the erosion of universality.

We believe that fully indexed pensions are a right. If indexing is removed, the universal concept of old age pensions is removed. It represents the erosion of a basic social program and right which this Party fought so very hard to introduce. We will fight just as hard to oppose a reduction in indexation. Pensions must be indexed to the real cost of living.

The Conservatives have been very hypocritical if one recalls what they said about reductions to workers' wages. If they feel strongly about this Bill, let them relinquish part of their wages to back up one of their arguments for Bill C-124, for example.

We believe that this Bill represents bad politics. As I have said, Liberal supporters across the country have gone on record as saying that they want universality and fully protected pensions and Family Allowances. We disagree with this Bill in principle, but may I remind Liberal Members that pensioners are voters. We are not opposing this Bill simply to be pragmatic and solicit votes, but let the pragmatic Liberals remember that many voters are pensioners. We will do our best to remind those pensioners in two years, or when the next election comes about, that it was the Liberals who cut back old age pensions. Undoubtedly, the Government will offer something to the

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pensioners to gain their vote shortly before the election but the pensioners will remember and will be reminded that they cannot be used as symbols in a restraint program or flattered with pre-election goodies.

In the time I have remaining I would like to refer to briefs that were presented by a number of organizations to the Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs during its debate on this Bill. Time only permits a brief excerpt from these presentations but it is important to put them on the record. I would urge those who are concerned about this Bill not just to take the word of the NDP but also to consider the views of many credible organizations that have experience in social policies. These groups include pensioners' organizations who are certainly experts on the question of pensions and the needs of the elderly in Canada, as well as groups that represent Canadian women.

I would first like to refer to a brief from the National Council on Welfare dated July, 1982:

Many elderly men and women who live at or just above the poverty line will be hurt by the Government's restraint program. A single pensioner with a total income of as low as \$9,200—more than \$500 below the poverty line for large urban centres—will sacrifice about \$55, just the same as someone living on affluent income.

In other words, those who earn high incomes will receive the same cut in indexing as those with marginal incomes. The brief went on to say that over 100,000 poor and near poor elderly Canadians will suffer.

On December 9, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women said that they—

—condemned the federal Government for limiting the cost of living indexation of Family Allowances and old age pensions. The two Liberal ceilings on indexation Bills do not improve the system but simply try to take advantage of the vulnerability of women and old people. Those most affected by Bill C-131 are the near poor elderly whose income is just a little too high to entitle them to the Guaranteed Income Supplement.

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women said on December 13:

Women are facing a reduction of 3 per cent to 5 per cent in the real value of Family Allowance and pensions. It is difficult to understand how indexing pensions below the level of need meets the objectives of the green paper on pension reform, which states that elderly Canadians should be guaranteed a minimum level of income. The recent Report of the Auditor General suggests that there may be other means of reducing Government spending.

We know what those means are. They would certainly be a higher restraint priority in the opinion of our Party.

On December 14 the Canadian Labour Council said:

Bill C-131 is extremely unjust because it is a tax that falls solely on people over 65, most of whom are people of modest means. Nothing is being said about tax exemptions for the elderly which actually provide benefits that increase with the taxable income—

The National Pensioners and Senior Citizens Federation felt that there should be full indexing and pensions above the poverty line.

The Canadian Council on Retirees strongly object to restraint programs which force pensioners to give up part of their pension increase and strongly oppose the attack on universality.