

help the approximately 1.1 million pensioners who are just slightly above the cut-off or poverty line.

Last summer I went on an extensive door-to-door tour of my constituency of Edmonton South. I spoke literally to hundreds of people, many of them senior citizens. Time and again they spoke of life on the brink of poverty with shoestring budgeting. It may well be that Bill C-131 will cost the senior citizens "only" \$290 over 1983 and 1984 in lost indexation that otherwise would have accrued to them, but I submit that this sum is too much for them to bear. A public opinion sounding which I took in my riding, moreover, revealed that fully 62.2 per cent of all my constituents supported increased, rather than reduced, support for senior citizens.

I also have reservations about the Government using GIS to make up the loss in Old Age Security. Since the Guaranteed Income Supplement is means tested, that suggests we are getting away from the principle of universality. It may be that Bill C-131 is thus the thin edge of the wedge; the beginning of a process by which government pensions will become a privilege and not a right.

Through these measures, the Government claims that it will be saving some \$31 million. The figures seem to vary as to what exactly will be saved. I do not think the Government even knows, except that it will be a rather minor amount relative to the totality of the federal budget deficit of some \$23 billion. I wonder whether it is worth breaking a fundamental commitment to the senior citizens of this country for this sum. Why does the Government not look at cutting the deficit through saving in Government advertising, which costs are now approaching \$100 million a year? What about many other expenditures which the Government can cut? Many of them the Government has made over the past decade largely to increase its own political popularity. Why does the Government not take a good, hard look at those kinds of things to try to approach some degree of sanity in the \$23 billion deficit level rather than going to the senior citizens first, the most vulnerable people? To make senior citizens an exception to the Government's six and five program might be doubly appropriate as a reflection of the Government's confidence in its own anti-inflation program. If the Government is so certain that inflation will fall, then payouts for Old Age Security will fall correspondingly. Hence, why is this ever optimistic Government breaching a trust and causing hardship to cap pensions which, when inflation falls, will not mean capping in any event?

Above all, the Government is being quite hypocritical in maintaining, as the Minister of National Health and Welfare did on second reading of this Bill, that Bill C-131 is "asking 1.1 million Old Age Pensioners to help lead the way in the fight against inflation?"

Finally, I object to this Bill because it is an ad hoc approach to a basic issue facing our society, which is the caring for the elderly in a manner which is economically viable, and above all socially just. We have spent literally hours of parliamentary time debating public service pensions, and now Old Age Security. Would it not have been more profitable to begin

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consideration of the broader question on aging and some action following the United Nations Conference on Aging which took place in Vienna in 1982? What about a long-range approach to consider all the implications of demographically changing lines in our society, in which we know we are entering, what is to be called the greying of our society?

To this end at the start of the new session, if there is ever going to be a new session and an end to this interminable first session that has brought such misery to the people of Canada, I will be proposing a motion to consider the subject of aging in its entirety; to consider all of the aspects of aging today, both demographically and economically. I will make some proposals in a Private Member's motion at that time, Sir.

Once more, I urge the Government to reconsider its short-term palliative Bill C-131. It breaks the Government's word, it creates hardship and it is hypocritical. Against these points, the gamesmanship of six and five is no defence whatsoever.

• (1610)

**Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River):** It is with a great deal of pleasure, Mr. Speaker, that I rise to speak on Bill C-131. Before I make my introductory remarks, I would like to comment on some of the input from the Hon. Member for Vancouver-Quadra (Mr. Clarke) who spoke previously. He seemed to have some problem in understanding why we ridicule his Party on their position on Bill C-124 before it came into law and on their present position of opposing the legislation relating to civil servant pensions and old age security. I think that most of us are confused about the Conservatives' position on leadership and a number of other matters. The Hon. Member suggested that we do not understand the economics of the issue. I fail to see how anyone can understand their actions after witnessing what they did last weekend and seeing their position on Bill C-124 last summer which invoked the six and five program.

I think people should be very aware of the Conservatives' view of that legislation at that time. There was an amendment moved by the NDP, which the Conservatives voted against, that the six and five legislation not apply to pensions. We are not talking about confusion; we are talking about blatant hypocrisy. That Party cannot have it both ways. They will either have to stand up on principle or put up and shut up. That is about the size of it.

It is rather interesting to see some of the responses that the Conservatives made to this legislation. They had many opportunities to have all their Members turn up and vote against the legislation, but their record is atrocious. As a matter of fact, when their Whip was asked where his people were on many occasions, he stated that they were out at static cling conferences and quilting bees. When the Hon. Member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie) was asked what his Party's policy would be on some of these economic issues that affect senior citizens, his response, as reported in *Maclean's* magazine was, "If we told them what we would do they certainly would not elect us in the forthcoming election." I suggest that we are looking at