

Old Age Security Act (No. 2)

most of us work in order to leave a little bit of capital for the next generation so that they can have a leg up, so that they can be a little bit ahead. It is in that way that we have increased the standard of living in our western society enormously since the times of kings and queens when our ancestors were serfs. But, Mr. Speaker, when the Government has deficits, it is imposing a mortgage on that next generation, just as surely as if it were cutting off their legs. As a result, they are less able to cope in life.

● (1700)

Surely, in times of inflation, 6 and 5 per cent is not a reasonable settlement of the problem. Six per cent of our income of \$65,000 means that from January 1 this year all Members of the House, including Members of the New Democratic Party, will accept an increase of about \$3,900. Yet we expect senior citizens, whose income may be about \$3,000, to take an increase of \$180. That is not right, Mr. Speaker, and this is not a Bill that I can support.

While I am a Conservative in terms of the importance of generating wealth and I know that we must have the capital of the nation owned and controlled by individuals, I know that millions of individual decisions on capital, whether they relate to small farms or little businesses, will lead to a much wiser result than a decision made by a king, a Prime Minister and a Cabinet, or a bureaucracy. As a Progressive Conservative, I believe that in times of inflation we cannot have percentage settlements in terms of social legislation. The rich get incredibly richer and the poor do not advance.

The Minister could have introduced a flat rate of \$1,000 across the board. In that way, senior citizens and those people who are hurt the most could recover the actual increase in the cost of living, and people making \$60,000 or \$90,000 would get \$1,000.

The Minister, with her \$100,000 income, cannot convince me that her actual cost of living has gone up by \$6,500. That is how much more she will take out of the economy this year, compared to last year. I do not believe that the Minister is working any harder than she did last year. Her productivity has not increased one whit, yet she is going to take \$6,500 more out of the Canadian economy, compared to the senior citizen who is living below the poverty line and will get \$180 more. That is not what we should stand for in this House, particularly when there is a solution.

In times of inflation we should go from percentage settlements to flat, across-the-board settlements. That would bring the Canadian people closer together and make them more equal in opportunity and the amount taken out of the economy.

I will resume my seat so that the Minister may rise, during my time, and answer that point.

Miss Bégin: I cannot, and you know the rule very well.

Mr. Thacker: Stand up and speak, Madam Minister.

Miss Bégin: Read your book.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The Hon. Member for Lethbridge-Foothills (Mr. Thacker) has the floor.

Mr. Thacker: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) will not rise.

Miss Bégin: I cannot rise.

Mr. Taylor: Stand up if you are going to make a speech.

Mr. Thacker: Mr. Speaker, I am sure the House would grant unanimous consent for the Minister to rise and answer the question I am putting to her. Normally at report stage, if it were not for the fact that the Government has imposed closure, she would have to rise, and she would rise.

Miss Bégin: I cannot. Read your rules.

Mr. Thacker: It is only because of the closure motion that she cannot answer. I will sit down now, because I want to ask the House for unanimous consent for the Minister to rise and answer the question why the Government introduced percentages rather than a flat, across-the-board settlement during times of inflation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent for the Minister of National Health and Welfare to rise at this point?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There appears to be consent.

Miss Bégin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Member knows very well that the rules prevent me from speaking at report stage and that I can only answer questions at third reading, but I appreciate the unanimous consent that Members have given me.

I answered the Hon. Member while he was speaking, but he may not have heard. A flat component in the income tax system always plays in favour of the wealthy. I think the Hon. Member is not familiar with the income tax system.

If he wants to be a little more specific and explain in exactly what form that amount of money would reach people, maybe then we could talk business. I am not sure if he is doing that or playing politics.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Hon. Member for Lethbridge-Foothills had ten minutes, and that is the normal time allowed. He may continue with unanimous consent of the House. Is there unanimous consent?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Some Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today on behalf of my constituents in Burnaby, particularly old age pensioners and those close to pension age. I am strongly opposed to Bill C-131 which, in many ways, constitutes an attack on the standard of living of some of the