

Supply

year by liquidating assets they have accumulated over the years, withdrawing RRSPs or transferring the latter.

This provision of the budget will affect them directly the following year by reducing their pension benefits. It is a known fact that the old age security programs to which seniors have contributed have virtually stopped being universal since 1989.

I have a hard time understanding why the Liberal government keeps going after this sector of the population, who, we must not forget, built this country. They are the government's preferred target, the one is bent on destroying by imposing unacceptable measures year after year, budget after budget, on these, society's most disadvantaged.

People then wonder why Quebecers want to throw off this federalism and become sovereign. The various old age security programs and the guaranteed income supplement are the principal sources of income of people over 65 years of age. These people, especially women, are much poorer than the population as a whole.

Is there anyone in this House who does not know that seniors are more disadvantaged because they are on pension and have lower incomes if they have not worked outside the home. This is the case of our mothers.

Their work at home was not paid nor used to calculate their retirement pension. Their only income therefore in the years to come will be the Canada pension cheque. And for how many years to come?

● (1215)

It is an injustice and the government amplifies it by declaring that old age security pensions will be based on family income in the future. This measure will force a great number of seniors, most of them women, to hand back their pensions.

According to Quebec's minister for the status of women, this measure would set women back 50 years. During that time, they have succeeded in being recognized by society as individuals, but now, because of budget cuts, they will see themselves forced to be viewed in relation to their spouses and to family income, once they retire.

We can justifiably wonder in what direction the federal government is headed when it comes to women's rights. My colleague from the government of Quebec is right when she adds that the principle of family income completely transforms the retirement income security program, replacing what was an insurance program by a social assistance program for needy families.

Canada made very clear public commitments in favour of gender equality and also took statutory measures to reach this objective. I refer to a Canadian document on violence against women. Section E.61 of its action plan states that Canada is

committed to analyzing all of the proposed amendments to the tax system in order to expose all of the discriminatory or negative effects that they will have on women. This principle has now been shelved.

Section E.66 of the same document states that Canada is committed to raising and ensuring full indexation of the threshold at which old age security benefits start being clawed back. Once again, this commitment has not been met.

Canada's commitment is very clear in this document: We are supposed to take all of the necessary measures, in particular legislative measures, to amend or abolish acts, regulations, customs and practices which discriminate against women. Is this what the government delivers in its budget? No. It has thrown all of its principles out the window.

The Minister of Finance offhandedly casts aside studies which have cost taxpayers a great deal of money and ignores basic principles in the name of deficit reduction. On the contrary, instead of going forward and giving seniors, in particular women, the means to attain these standards, the budget places these standards further out of their reach.

Let us be serious. I understand very well that everything has a price and that there is a cost associated with this initiative. However, why not hit banks, tax havens and family trusts and leave seniors in peace. They have sweat blood and tears to build this country which, today, is rejecting them. Is this federalism?

Have seniors not already given enough by working all of their lives and paying their taxes? Who else do you think filled the government's coffers?

In conclusion, I would like to remind you that Quebec's sovereignty does not jeopardize senior's incomes. The threat to old age pensions comes from the federal government. That is the price to be paid for maintaining the status quo, the price to be paid for voting no in the upcoming referendum.

In a sovereign Quebec, a matter like the one mentioned at the beginning of this speech, namely the government's insensitivity to the situation of women, will not even be an issue. Equity will be the order of the day.

● (1220)

Mr. Mac Harb (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am quite amazed to see this motion by the opposition. I would have wished for a preamble which could have read as follows: "That this House commend the government for all the measures it has taken to date to create opportunities for women".

My hon. colleague is forgetting that, in our 1994 budget, we reiterated our commitment at the federal level to provide \$100 million to the emergency repair program. We also reinstated the court challenges program which provides funding for cases