

Government Orders

members opposite stated that during the election. This party on this side of the House dealt with that during the election and the finance minister is dealing with it now.

In terms of identifying issues I do not think members on that side of the House are in some way on the cutting edge of knowing what Canadians are thinking. I would agree to an extent that they may know what is going on in certain very limited regional areas of the west, but I do not think that in the mainstream of Canada they are able to discern what is on the minds of Canadians.

Mr. Hart: Mr. Speaker, I remind the member that not only are there Reform Party of Canada members in western Canada. They are from coast to coast and we do have townhall meetings right across the country.

Can the member just give me one area? I think all of Canada should be able to come to any member of Parliament and ask for one area where money can be saved in a specific program.

For the third time I would like to ask the same question. Will the member identify one area in old age security where we can have substantive savings, and will he tell us the figure we would save?

Mr. Gallaway: Mr. Speaker, it is a hallmark of members opposite that they do not like to speak about the legislation before the House. They would rather speak about their grand scheme of Canada and their identification through their unique patented processes called townhall meetings.

As a result of all the townhall meetings they are apparently having in Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia and other provinces, why does the member opposite not tell us the results of what Canadians are telling them in terms of what the number one issues of the day are?

Mr. Silye: On a point of clarification, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Perhaps the member would like to speak to a point of order.

Mr. Silye: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. According to the Standing Orders I understand that when members ask ministers of the crown questions in question period they do not necessarily have to answer. In debate and under questions and comments do members of Parliament have to answer?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Clearly the Speaker does not deem the matter to be a point of order; it is more a matter of debate.

[Translation]

Mr. Gaston Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe, B.Q.): Mr. Speaker, as the member for Richmond—Wolfe, I am pleased to participate in this debate on Bill C-54, which concerns an

extremely important group of people in our society, to whom we owe a great deal.

A society which respects its seniors is one which respects its past as well as the wisdom and the maturity that come with it.

• (1220)

Such a society tends to create a healthy environment for future generations and it is the Bloc Québécois' goal to promote and build such a society, and not to destroy a country, as Liberal and Reform Party members like to think.

In Canada, 21 per cent of seniors, that is 625,000 of them, live in poverty. The proportion of old people with low incomes is always greater than for the population as a whole. In 1992, the average income of families made up of seniors was 30 per cent lower than that of other families. Between 1982 and 1992, the average income of seniors increased by 6 per cent, compared to 10 per cent for the rest of Canadians. In 1992, the average income of seniors living alone was \$18,434, while that of other persons in the same situation was \$25,000.

This reality of the Canadian society certainly does not support claims by the Prime Minister to the effect that Canada is a good place to live.

It must be recognized that Bill C-54, which amends the Old Age Security Act and in particular the Canada Pension Plan, includes several measures which will have a positive impact on programs for seniors. However, this legislation is clearly inadequate when it comes to alleviating the problem of poverty among our seniors. On the contrary, some provisions of the bill reflect a strong desire by the government to increase social controls and to pinch pennies at the expense of the poorest Quebecers and Canadians.

Bill C-54 contains some positive provisions, like the ones making the application process for Old Age Security benefits, the guaranteed income supplement and the Canada Pension Plan more flexible. For example, spouse's allowances will now be automatically converted into Old Age Security benefits when recipients turn 65 years of age.

This bill also includes some more provisions that could improve the lot of the elderly in both our societies. For instance, guaranteed income supplement and spouse's allowances will now be paid to the recipients even though their applications were late. Individuals will now be able to cancel assignments of pensions at any time, assignments meaning the transfer of all or part of a pension to a spouse.

Recipients will also be able to ask the federal government to directly reimburse the various provincial benefits they have received while they wait to become eligible for Old Age Security or Canada Pension Plan benefits. To exempt benefits from seizure and to let older people who want to appeal decisions to do so by making requests for reconsideration