

Senior Citizens' Day

matter could be referred to the appropriate committee. I think, Mr. Speaker, you will find disposition of this side of the House to concur in the recommendation made by the Hon. Member from Alberta.

Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House also concur in the motion and agree that it be referred to committee. In so doing, we certainly acknowledge the particular contribution of people in the older age group of our society. We respect and appreciate not only what they contributed in the past, but what they are contributing today and will indeed contribute in the future.

● (1750)

In bringing forward this motion, I wonder if there has been consultation with senior citizens' groups from across the country. My experience has been that people in this age group feel increasingly that they do not all want to be categorized together and they do not like to be labelled. I would be very interested to know the feelings of this group as to how this day might be celebrated.

Certainly one of the things I have learned from various groups not only in my own riding but in meetings with councils of seniors who have come to Ottawa is that seniors are very resentful of any kind of Government program or policy that is in the least bit patronizing. They want to participate in society as equals and they have much to contribute. Certainly, past and present experience indicates that their experience is extremely valuable and something which society needs.

I am thinking particularly of the experiences of my own riding. Seniors have helped each other and not only have they helped each other but they have helped other people in society. I am moved to say as did my colleague that it is the seniors who showed how much fight they had when they organized to force the Government to repeal the very unfair policy which would have deindexed pensions. It is the grandparents and older people in society who also believe that the Government should back down in the same way and remove the deindexing plan which exists in Bill C-70 and would impose a reduction in indexation on family allowances. Many groups to which I spoke last spring felt just as strongly about the children of Canada as they did about the pensioners.

I am sure all Members will agree that a very important contribution made by seniors is their real desire to contribute as reformers in society. One example of this is the experience to which I just referred but there are many others of which I can think. In Vancouver, it was senior citizen and pensioners' groups that formed together in a very effective coalition to work as a solidarity movement to oppose many of the very unjust policies that were being imposed by the provincial Government of British Columbia. They did it not only because the policies were very damaging for people in their own age groups but because the policies were very damaging for society in general.

We certainly agree that senior citizens should be recognized on a special day. They should be recognized as the builders of

our country and contributors to it during the productive working years of their lives. They should be recognized as being great fighters for reform. They certainly deserve not only the respect of all of us but also the very great sensitivity to the situation faced by many seniors today.

Just briefly, I would like to mention the particular concern all of us should have and I hope do have for the older poor and particularly for elderly women who are not yet 65 years old but are in the middle years of their lives and who have very few resources being alone and not able to enter the workforce. Their poverty continues as they reach a pensionable age. They receive very low pension benefits and are therefore condemned to a cycle of poverty. These are things that we must remember as we celebrate a day that would honour senior citizens. We would hope that it would be considered by all Hon. Members of the House. In closing, I would like to say that we agree with the proposal. We hope that there will be consultation with senior citizens' groups as to how best we should celebrate this day. With that, I will sit down.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Gabrielle Bertrand (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, since there is unanimous consent on both sides of the House, I ask that the motion be referred to committee.

Mr. Jean-Claude Malépart (Montreal-Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak to this motion. I am rather puzzled that a Government Member, after they decided to cut back, to deindex Old Age pensions, after they forced senior citizens to make a historic gesture, something they never had to do before to defend their rights in Canada . . . these people had to come all the way to Parliament Hill, although under previous governments, Members of this House had been ready to defend their interests, to protect them from undue health care costs, and to guarantee them a better income. And now the hypocrisy of designating a Senior Citizen's Day! Mr. Speaker, will it be the day Mrs. Denis came here to tell the Prime Minister what senior citizens thought of him? Will the honorary president be Mrs. Solange Denis, who stood up for the rights of senior citizens? Where was the mover of this motion when senior citizens were asking him for help?

Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely shocking that now that Christmas time is approaching, when families go to visit their parents, that we had to fight those Government Members who wanted to cut Old Age Security pension cheques—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Order. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mrs. Bertrand), on a point of order.

Mrs. Bertrand: Mr. Speaker, since earlier, we received the consent of both sides of the House, I would like to ask the Hon. Member for Montreal-Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart) whether he is for or against the motion?