

Supply

about the pleas which they have received from pensioners in their ridings. However, I am grateful that a handful of Conservative Members had the courage to make these comments in public. Perhaps they are afraid that the discussions which have been going on behind closed doors are not sufficient. I am thankful on behalf of senior citizens that these Members have spoken out. If they had not done so, people would be left to believe that all Conservative Members felt that it was right to deindex the pensions. I would not like that because I would like some of them to be re-elected the next time; perhaps not as many as the last election but some of them.

[Translation]

As I said, Mr. Speaker, the members are not the only ones to object to the ruthless measures against senior citizens, especially those most in need. Now, one thing should be clear. We are not worried if the pension of a bank president or the old age pension of Mr. Trudeau, the former Prime Minister, are deindexed, but we are concerned about recipients of the guaranteed income supplement. Those people have no other income and most of them are under the poverty line. This is what concerns us as well as an increasing number of people throughout Canada.

This morning, I read that some groups were protesting the provisions of the budget dealing with senior citizens including the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, an organization highly considered in the country, the National Council of Welfare, the National Organization against Poverty, the Advisory Committee on the Status of Women, the Canadian Council on Social Development. All those organizations object to the measures included in the budget to reduce indexation for needy persons.

Those people have stated, and I quote: "The income of the poorer and most vulnerable among our senior citizens will be reduced over the years." They understand that the income of older persons will be reduced and I can only repeat very seriously what may seem presumptuous for a political party with only 40 members in this House, that we will continue to fight as long as the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) does not alter his budget. I wish that warning to be perfectly clear and unequivocal.

[English]

We will not drop this fight until the Minister of Finance has decided to do something to correct this most blatant inequity, in our opinion and in the opinion of thousands of people across the country. We will not be alone, we 40 Liberals and 30 New Democrats in this House of Commons. Thousands of people agree with what we are saying. We are simply repeating what they are telling us. I see the Parliamentary Secretary is starting to nod his head.

Mr. Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): I will tell you what I am hearing.

Mr. Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Maybe, maybe. I should like to refer to another aspect of the Budget. It has been

indicated in the press and in various studies that 750,000 people will be pushed below the poverty line because of that deindexation. This is something that we cannot accept. This is something which we will fight. I repeat that we will fight to the end. Members on the government side of the House will probably be surprised to see the energy we will put into it.

[Translation]

What surprised me this afternoon as I listened to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) was, probably owing to Cabinet solidarity, the unexpected change in his attitude. Ministers of National Health and Welfare have generally been the defenders of the most underprivileged in our society, the elderly who get the guaranteed income supplement, but this afternoon he spoke as a Minister of Finance whose job is to control the deficit. That is the kind of speech he made. Surprisingly enough, he told us that benefits will not be guaranteed to the elderly 15 or 20 years down the road unless we immediately reduce the pensions now paid to the poorest Canadians. Strange indeed.

Mr. Boudria: Shame!

Mr. Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Yes, shame is the word to describe the situation.

All Ministers of National Health and Welfare have been that way, and even before the Budget the present Minister was hailed as the defender and champion of the poor. I am sure that Cabinet solidarity makes it harder for him to say clearly what he thinks in public, and I can appreciate that, but I dare hope he has already been in touch with the Minister of Finance to straighten out the situation.

We would not go back to the old system when old age security pensions were raised now and then by the Party in office. It was almost blackmail since the elderly never knew whether pensions would go up or not. Since 1976, indexation has been a regular process on which senior citizens can rely and which had become a must in our society. That is why the Party I represent—

[English]

Mr. Dick: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I was wondering whether the Deputy House Leader of the Official Opposition wanted to carry on the debate on this matter, considering that the Party which proposed it does not have a Member in the House.

Mr. Mazankowski: That is the NDP.

Mr. Dick: That is the New Democratic Party. It does not have a soul in the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): That point of order is out of order.

Mr. Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Mr. Speaker, I will just answer that point briefly. We are not here to support the New Democratic Party or the Conservative Party. We are here to