

Supplementary Retirement Benefits Act (No. 2)

budget was presented in this House of Commons, as is proper and traditional in British Parliamentary practice.

Mr. Crosbie: Mr. Speaker, this is the first opportunity I have had to participate in this new enterprise of asking questions. I must say it is difficult because I have to sit through the speeches in order to ask the questions. But I have done that, and I have been sufficiently punished in having to listen to that Hon. Member try to rationalize. My question to him is: does he, as a Member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre, think that the Canadian Government has the right, legally or morally, to unilaterally change the pension plan for the Public Service retirees, those people who are already retired, as proposed in the legislation that is now before the House? That is the question, not all of these specious rationalizations which the Hon. Member has engaged in. This is a question he is being asked by people who live in his district and which he has failed to answer. He sends out form letters which do not answer the questions which he is asked.

• (1610)

I have a letter here which asks a simple question. Does the Member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Evans), where many thousands of pensioners live, think that he has the right to support the Government, legally or morally, in unilaterally changing this pension plan for people who are retired? Yes or no. It is a simple question which his constituents deserve to have an answer to, not all this mish-mash of this fund or that fund and amalgamate the fund. He is putting the blocks to those pensioners and they want an answer.

Mr. Evans: Mr. Speaker, I stood on my voting record at second reading, and I will stand on my voting record on third reading, in answer to that question.

Mr. Crosbie: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to blackguard the hon. gentleman unnecessarily because he is so easy to blackguard by just using the truth. Did the hon. gentleman vote for the principle of this legislation, and has he voted for it continuously since it came into the House? Because if he did, it means he believes the Government has the right, legally and morally, to change the pension plan unilaterally. His constituents want to know that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Order. Before allowing that question, the Chair should perhaps caution Hon. Members that the question has to relate to the topic at hand. Questions relating to previous votes, it seems to me, stretch the matter of relevancy a great distance.

Mr. Crosbie: It is this Bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): If the Chair may suggest, Members' votes are one the record for all Members and the public to see. I would appeal to Hon. Members to adhere as much as possible to the rule of relevancy and not refer to something which happened in this House at some previous time in the course of other stages of the debate. But in any

case, I will recognize the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Evans) for the purpose of answering the question as put.

Mr. Evans: Mr. Speaker, I will answer the question as put. As I have said from day one on this, as long as taxpayers' dollars are being used to pay, then the Government has not only the right but the obligation to see that those taxpayers' dollars are properly used. If a restraint program is going to be applied to the expenditure of taxpayers' dollars, then it should apply globally to the expenditure of taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. Crosbie: Mr. Speaker, I have some sympathy for the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Evans) because I can see how he is torn between his duty and loyalty to the Government which he supports in the House of Commons and his loyalty and duty to his constituents who in many cases are currently employed in the federal Public Service and in other cases are retired members of that Public Service. I want to help him along with his difficulty by pointing out to him that when the so-called six and five program was introduced in the House of Commons on June 28, 1982, by the then Minister of Finance, the Hon. Member for Cape Breton Highlands-Canso (Mr. MacEachen), the indication was that the Government was promoting a restraint in the Government spending program to bring inflation into line, and possibly to bring it down to the level of six and five. That was the goal as announced by the Government in the House, and I can see why the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre might be prepared to support that program in the interests of his constituency which includes both retired and working federal public servants.

However, the problem I now see for the Hon. Member is that seven months have gone by, we are now at the end of January, the inflation rate is 9.3 per cent and nowhere near the six and five. Is he not now faced with revising the view he took months ago in support of the Government's program? Is he not now faced with his duty and loyalty to his constituents in that the Government has been proved to be wrong in its prognostications, there will be no 6 per cent or 5 per cent inflation rate and in fact his constituents are faced with a 9.3 per cent inflation rate?

Is he now prepared to revise his view, abandon the position he has taken in the past, and now vote against this terrible Bill?

Mr. Evans: No, Mr. Speaker. The Government's six and five program, in conjunction with other economic policies, is indeed working. Inflation has gone down from over 11 per cent in the early summer to 9.3. If we look at the last three months of the year it is down to 6.5 per cent; indeed, there was no change at all in the price index during the month of December.

On this issue, Mr. Speaker, I think there is a long Public Service tradition, with which I was raised when I was working in the Public Service, that you give the best possible advice to your Minister and then when the Minister makes a decision, you stand behind your Minister. That tradition is alive and well in the Liberal Party of Canada and, I would expect, in the New Democratic Party as well. I tell the Hon. Member that he