

debate today where the Members are being fair and are being accurate and are trying to deal with the problem”.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Tobin: Mr. Speaker, if I had the exact numbers in front of me, I am afraid that the answer would be very embarrassing for the Hon. Member opposite. Let me read from this six and five proposal as outlined in the MacEachen document. There is quite a difference. It reads:

Pensioners most in need must also be fully protected from the limitation on the indexing factor. The Guaranteed Income Supplement for senior citizens with lower incomes will continue to be fully indexed. In addition, everyone receiving the GIS will get a supplement to the GIS payment offsetting fully the limitation on indexation of Old Age Security payments.

Veterans' pensions will continue to be fully indexed.

Setting that aside, the important difference here is that the six and five program was a program that applied to every government Department, every government service, every government program, every government salary for two years. I do not have the exact numbers, but I will tell the Hon. Member that it cost everybody in this country very little because inflation went down to about six and five in those two years. The difference is that it did not fundamentally alter or change permanently the program as this budget measure does which says that every year for the next four or five years senior citizens will lose with certainty 3 per cent of the value of their pension a year.

That is quite different. You are not talking about a one-year program; you are talking about a change to the Old Age Security payment system in this country. It is fundamentally different. It has been expressed by many groups.

I heard the Hon. Member accuse me of providing false information. Is he accusing the senior citizens of this country of providing false information? Is he accusing the Council of Maritime Premiers, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Quebec National Assembly, the Manitoba Progressive Conservative Party, or the Conservative Parties of the Atlantic region? Are all of those people wrong in their assessment of what this measure means for senior citizens? I beg to differ with the Hon. Member. I am afraid they are not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The period for questions and comments is now over. We will now resume debate with the Hon. Member for Oshawa (Mr. Broadbent).

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, I rise with pleasure to participate in the debate, but not at all with pleasure to have to say the things that have to be said about this Government that has betrayed its commitment to the people of Canada in general and to Canada's pensioners in particular.

I also want to say that I listened with interest to the speech that has just been given and I want to say without hesitation that it was a moving expression of concern for the senior citizens of Canada. There was not one word uttered in that speech that would not have the wholehearted endorsement of my Party.

Supply

● (1140)

Some two decades ago, a very distinguished Canadian said the following:

I hope that, having accepted the principle that retirement security should be on the basis of adequacy, we will go on improving that basis, finding ways of raising the levels of our pensions so that all Canadians can look forward to a retirement in decency and dignity.

Those words were uttered by the Hon. Stanley Knowles, a man whom all Members of the House have honoured in the past, a man who assumes a special place in the Parliament of Canada and has a chair at the Table with the Officers of this Chamber, a man who, more than any other Canadian of any Party, devoted his life to improving the well-being of our senior citizens. I cite him because he was honoured by all Members of the House of all Parties as he had the support of the overwhelming majority of Canadians for that to which he had devoted his life, namely, ensuring that when Canadians retire, they do not simply have to eke out an existence but ought to be able to assume a life of dignity. There is a fundamental difference between the two.

What Mr. Knowles said some years ago is a tradition that we in our Party thought had come to be shared by Members of all Parties. We had thought that this attitude had become engrained in the traditions not only of Canadians outside the House of Commons but had become part of the traditions within the Parties of the House.

I regret to say that rather than building on the basic change in our attitude toward pensioners and rather than building to create the possibility of a greater dignity and a greater feeling of security for our pensioners, as has been the tradition of the Canadian Parliament for the past four or five decades, the present Government has done just the opposite. It has broken faith with the traditions of our House. It has broken faith with the traditions that we thought had become established within the Conservative Party itself.

Members of my Party find it heartless and cruel that we as a Parliament should be voting on legislation that will fight the deficit on the backs of the pensioners. We find it heartless and cruel and, frankly stated, a moral abomination, to have a Government in 1985 that would bring before the Parliament of Canada a measure that will add 200,000 pensioners to the poverty list in Canada. That is a moral abomination.

Half of the 2.6 million pensioners of Canada are already so poor in 1985 that they receive either partial or full supplements. That is how bad the current situation is. Among those Canadians are women, and I would like to mention, as it is significant indeed, the plight of Canadian women who become old.

[*Translation*]

Yesterday I was in Montreal where I met some senior citizens. One senior explained what the situation was like for elderly women today. I think what she said is far more eloquent than anything I could say, and I quote: