

Old Age Security

on this subject and issued a press release. So I presume he has made a commitment to the public of British Columbia.

Mr. Jelinek: Mr. Chairman, I shall be very brief as there is not much more left to be said about Bill C-219 except to state emphatically that the measure is long overdue and falls far short of satisfying the requirements of the senior citizens of this country. Let us also realize that the bill would not be before us had it not been for the inability of the government to solve the railway dispute without recalling Parliament.

The government continues to spend millions upon millions of dollars on programs which have little to offer the country in the way of constructive development, but when it comes to our senior citizens, those same citizens who have made this country the great nation that it is today, like amounts of dollars can never be found. It makes no sense to me that the government should spend millions of dollars each year on Rochdales, Satan worshipers and on LIP or OFY programs, far too many of which are worthless, while the incomes of our senior citizens decrease in value because of the spiralling increase in the cost of living.

The bill presently before the House deals only superficially with the real problems facing senior citizens on fixed incomes. Once again the government has introduced legislation which the opposition parties have been insisting upon for months. As always, the senior citizen bears the brunt of government inaction and is forced to take the largest cut inflicted by the sharp knife of inflation.

While the government urges all sectors of the economy to curb inflationary spending, it continues to disregard its own advice by embarking upon a program of government expenditure unparalleled in the history of any country in the world. In the area of government salary administration alone, in the last ten years the number of people making the equivalent of \$20,000 a year has doubled. Quite simply, if the government itself is not able to control spending effectively in its own departments, it certainly cannot be expected to control spending in other sectors of the economy.

One aspect of the bill which even the government is conceding is that inflation under the Liberal administration will continue to take its course. Not only are members opposite incapable of controlling this inflation, but they are anticipating such increases in the future that they have attempted to placate senior citizens by appearing to give them something, though in reality all they are doing is letting them remain at their already low standards. If the intention was to make this legislation truly effective, the effects of the spiralling cost of living over the past year should have been taken into consideration.

The subject is a most serious one, Mr. Chairman, and I would be remiss if I did not express my disdain for the tone in which the Minister of National Health and Welfare addressed the House and the partisan stand he chose to take when presenting this bill. His attack on all members of the opposition was unwarranted and in questionable taste; in no way did it enhance the stature of himself or of his party.

As I have often stated, all hon. members in this chamber naturally approve any proposals for increasing financial

[Mr. Lalonde.]

assistance to senior citizens. But is the government seriously suggesting that the passage of the bill before us will in any way help fight the high rate of inflation, or, more specifically, deal with the high cost of living? We all know from recent statistics that in the past few months the cost of living in Canada has increased more rapidly than during any similar period in the past 25 years.

I am sure no Canadian needs to look at statistics to realize that we are in the midst of one of the worst inflationary periods the country has ever known. Every time we go into a store, whether it is to buy clothing, food, or any other commodity, we are confronted with dramatic price increases. And if one has been following developments in the real estate market, it soon becomes evident that owning a house has become only a dream for the majority of Canadians.

Rents, too, are rising, as are interest rates. Everything is more expensive and, as usual, the people most dramatically affected are those who must live on low and fixed incomes. Once again the government is trying to escape these facts by presenting superficial bills, such as the one before us, which provide no relief but only serve to perpetuate an already intolerable situation.

The time has come for the government to face its responsibilities to the people of this country. Indeed, it has long passed. We are in the grip of an inflationary spiral which threatens to strangle our economy if we are not prepared to take positive action now. On one hand, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance oppose economic controls. On the other hand, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance are imposing selective controls.

Upon close analysis of recent, so-called controls applied to the petroleum industry it becomes increasingly apparent that the government has failed to offer any real protection to the Canadian consumer. We all recall the measures taken to set up the Food Prices Review Board. Here another piece of toothless legislation has been drafted as a smokescreen to cover up inaction and a genuine lack of concern. It is obvious that the credibility of the Liberal government will soon sink as low as that of the NDP.

It must be made clear to everybody in this country that what is placed before us in Bill C-219 is not progressive legislation but merely one step, long overdue, which falls far short of providing meaningful gains to the senior citizens.

Mr. Stackhouse: Mr. Chairman, I like the way in which the Minister of National Health and Welfare has been generous in sending out copies of his speeches to his colleagues at public expense. I have read them with great interest and appreciation, so much so there are times when I think the Prime Minister might well appoint the speech-writer to be Minister of National Health and Welfare. There seems to be such a gap between the sentiments expressed by the minister in his speeches and the action embodied in the legislation which he submits.

One of the things that concerns us in the present debate is this gap between promise and performance. Certainly we see it in the bill which is before us, a measure which offers all too inadequate a solution to the needs of the old age pensioners. I can remember just a few days ago when people from one coast to the other ridiculed the minister of