

I have received numerous letters from constituents and from Canadians across the country who will be seriously affected if this piece of legislation is in fact enacted. One gentleman in my own riding, a Mr. Wilson, a retired public servant, has sat down with me on several occasions to express his concern about what is going to happen to his income once this legislation has been passed. I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that this gentleman is a rather bitter Canadian these days when he considers the kind of service he has given to this country through the Public Service and now the Government is turning around and saying to him: "Look, even though you bought inflation protection through deferred income, even though you bought that inflation protection specifically, we are now going to renege on that and not give you the full inflation protection you thought you had bought".

I have heard many Members of the Government stand up here and try to defend the indefensible which is contained in this piece of legislation. It is typical of this Government, and of that particular Party over there, that it is doing this kind of thing again, breaking the social contract, if not the legal contract that it has with Canadians. It was not so long ago, in 1977, for example, when the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) himself said that pensioners were the victims and not the cause of inflation. In a letter to the Public Service Alliance in 1977 he in fact said, and I quote:

Thank you for your telegram of September 27. I have noted your concern that the indexation of Government pensions be maintained.

In our society, pensions provide a means of sharing risk so that we can retire in reasonable security and dignity, without fear of the future. Protecting pensions from inflation by indexing them to increases in the cost of living should be an integral part of our pension schemes. Indexing does not give pensioners an increasingly larger claim on our economy's production, that is, more money to buy things they could not earlier afford. Rather, indexing merely enables pensioners to maintain, roughly, their same standard of living.

Even a modest rate of inflation destroys, at a devastating rate, the buying power of people on fixed incomes. Pensioners are out of the workforce and cannot bargain or strike for larger incomes. They are not the cause of inflation; they are its victim.

Many other Canadians, as well as myself, have become rather used to this kind of Liberal about-face where they make promises, give assurances, even go on national television to pontificate to Canadians about the need for trust between people in this country, and they then turn around in the most hypocritical fashion and stick it to people such as those on fixed incomes, and pensioners in particular. They would be of more service to Canadians if they were to address the real problems in this country today rather than attack those who are at least able to defend themselves.

In this country today, as the Leader of my Party indicated the other day, the real unemployment rate is in excess of two million people. Unemployment is without question the major problem which Canadians face today. The Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, made reference to this in a recent document which has received wide attention across the country. They said, in part, and I quote:

—greater emphasis should be given to the goal of social responsibility in the current recession. This means that every effort must be made to curtail cutbacks

in social services, maintain adequate health care and social security benefits, and above all, guarantee special assistance for the unemployed, welfare recipients, the working poor and one-industry towns suffering from plant shutdowns.

I totally agree, Mr. Speaker, that is the emphasis and direction this Government should go in. But rather than that, it has chosen to take a swipe at people who are at the low end of the income scale, who are least able to defend themselves, such as senior citizens, retired public servants, Family Allowance recipients, and all the rest.

The Conservative Party is standing up in this House also defending the position which they took last August in supporting the Government in this horrendous piece of legislation. They are standing up now and saying: "We are in favour of restraint, but not really restraint, especially when it could reflect on the electoral chances we may have in the next election". They now see the kind of opposition which has been generated in the country against this offensive piece of legislation. But although the Conservative Members may want to stand up here and make those attempts to convince Canadians that they were not serious when they did that kind of thing, I suggest it is an integral part of the philosophy of that Party to go along with the kinds of initiatives this Government has taken. In fact, at the Tory conference held early in 1981 the Party conducted a questionnaire among the delegates. Then they did something I thought they may have been reluctant to do; they actually issued the results of this questionnaire so that the public could see quite clearly exactly the position they would take if they were ever, unfortunately, elected to form the Government of this country.

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For example, 62 per cent of the delegates said quite clearly that they favoured a reduction in Family Allowance outlays, compared with 30 per cent who would leave these unchanged. Asked how they would categorize their economic views, 66 per cent of the delegates described themselves as being either to the right of the average Canadian or much further to the right. As for their social views, 58 per cent put themselves to the far right of the average Canadian.

I hear one of the more right-wing Members of the Conservative Party. He was probably discouraged at the relatively low percentage who said they were as right-wing as he was. He complains about the statement I just made. But the fact is that it is not something I dreamt up, Mr. Speaker. The Tories have said it themselves. Certainly their actions when they were the Government would clearly show to all Canadians that if they were ever elected, they would be as bad as, if not worse than, that crowd over there.

I see my time has run out, Mr. Speaker, so therefore I will end on that happy note.

[Translation]

Hon. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, I should like to speak for a few minutes on behalf of Quebec and most emphatically against the bill now under consideration. I have every reason to believe that very few Quebec Members have