

*Old Age Security Act (No. 2)*

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is a clear indication that the Government has no sense of priorities and that it is totally incapable of managing the economy. In fact, the Bill should never have been introduced in the House. It is absolutely inconceivable that the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) should introduce a Bill like this in the House. I wonder what she told the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde) when this proposal was made. As far as this bill is concerned, Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister does not know where she is going.

[English]

Seldom in this Chamber have we had occasion in such a short period of time to stand and try to defend average Canadians who live at or near the poverty line. For anyone, a Minister of the Crown or a backbencher on the Liberal side, to believe that the Government has not at the very least attacked the senior citizens of the country in terms of their psychological comfort is to deny reality.

I was in Winnipeg some two weeks ago and appeared on a hotline radio show with the critic of the New Democratic Party. The subject was health, and the host kept trying to get questions from the listening audience on health. For two solid hours every person who phoned in did so because they were worried about their pension incomes. For the Minister to try to suggest to the House that pensioners are not concerned about their incomes and their standard of living is to mislead the House, because they are. Canadian families are upset about the Government's intention in relation to the Family Allowance; and senior citizens, those in our population who are 65 years of age and older, are concerned about the attack on their pension income.

We heard in committee several attempts by the Minister to reassure its members that the incomes of senior citizens were not being attacked. That is simply not so. When we listened to the parade of witnesses who came before the committee, we were struck by the quality of their testimony and by the concerns they presented. I remember one witness who said that every Canadian who was 15 or 20 years of age should be concerned about Bill C-131.

The Bill is flawed in many ways, but in one way it clearly affects future generations of Canadians. I am referring to the fact that in the Bill before us there is no provision to restore the base of the pension. Liberal Members opposite would like to rob pensioners for the next two years, but having robbed them they have no intention of restoring the base so that future pensioners will no longer be robbed. Instead we have a Bill placed before us which robs Canadians into the future as far as any of us can see, and it robs Canadians to whom we owe the greatest debt because they helped settle the country. Their labour, their initiative and their concern has made the nation what it is today. The people who built this Chamber in which we now debate brought their skills, energies and talents and worked their lives out on behalf of this country. I assume that most of them have now passed on. Many others who have done the same have now reached an age at which they are no longer members of the work force or of a bargaining unit of any kind.

They no longer have the skills to offer, and in terms of income they are defenceless. Yet this Minister brings forward a Bill which says to those defenceless people: "We are going to rob you for the next two years and then we are going to rob succeeding generations for the next ten to fifty years down the road". That is the intent of this legislation, because the Bill which deals with taxation will be difficult to amend.

● (1640)

I commend the Hon. Member for Okanagan North for trying to correct this long-term robbery. That Hon. Member has moved an amendment which would restore the Old Age Security base so that once again on January 1, 1985, 50 pensioners would receive what they are entitled to today through full indexation. This would reduce the potential effect of inflation. Surely that is a reasonable amendment, one which Members on all sides of the House could support. It is not the kind of amendment that could bring down the Government.

We heard the Minister stand in the House and suggest that the amendment was badly worded, encouraging Liberal Members to vote against it. When we challenged the Minister to prepare a better worded amendment, indicating that if she did so we would give it our unanimous consent in order to restore the indexation base, she quickly backed down. That was one of the most disappointing things I have experienced in my three and a half years as a Member of this Chamber. If the Minister's problem was with wording but she accepts the principle of the amendment, surely she should at least attempt to seek unanimous approval for a newly worded amendment that would make the proposition acceptable to the Government. To do otherwise forces us to reach one inescapable conclusion; the game of politics is being played by the Minister of the Crown and not by Members of the Opposition.

I have stood before in this Chamber talking about the responsibilities of Government and Members in times of economic difficulty. That responsibility is more difficult to carry out in such times than in times of economic growth, development and surplus. Day after day, week after week, month after month and now year after year, we in this Chamber have been treated to a series of perverse choices, perverse in the sense of stubbornness and because the choices are exactly opposite to those that should be made.

Yesterday a Member of this Party pointed out that the Minister had indicated to the committee that this Government's spending priority was to purchase service stations to protect jobs. She said that was a greater priority than providing money in support of families, senior citizens and medical care. The Hon. Member for Bruce-Grey (Mr. Gurbin) rose on a point of order and put on the record that the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) had made such a statement. She is reported in *Hansard* as having said that the Hon. Member was lying. The Minister withdrew that remark, but not graciously. She said that she stood by the truth of her statement.