

Old Age Security Act (No. 2)

stabbing one another in the back that they are to the point where they are muddled in their thinking?

What we are seeing in Canada is the disintegration of the Conservative Party. Those of us who come from Western Canada are concerned that we really have an Opposition in this House. Therefore, it falls to us in the New Democratic Party to provide an Opposition, a real Opposition, to this terrible Trudeau Liberal Government. That is the task we will begin today.

I am pleased to begin on behalf of constituents of mine, old people and young people, who are concerned and have written to me about the effects of the six and five program. This Bill robs a million pensioners of benefits. I use the word "robbed" because it limits the indexing of Old Age Security to 6 per cent in 1983 and 5 per cent in 1984. It means, as well, that older people will be out of pocket as a result of reductions in benefit levels in the two-year period 1983 to 1984.

• (1120)

Second, it means that when and if indexing is reintroduced in 1985, the calculation will be computed on a lower base than it would have been if full indexing had been permitted over that period. Therefore, pensioners in Canada will suffer a permanent reduction in the amount of Old Age Security benefits. Our calculations are that it will be close to \$300 that old age pensioners will lose. Over half of this group is women who are in particular need of money.

I ask the Government, where is the equity and justice in this six and five program when it takes \$300 from the pensioners in Canada? There are Governments in this country which bail out the big companies, such as \$500 million for Dome. This Government takes \$300 away from each pensioner in Canada but provides \$500 million for large oil companies and the banks who back the debts of Dome.

In my Province of British Columbia, the Government has even bailed out a ski hill, Whistler Mountain. The B.C. Government is prepared to bail out speculators and developers of a ski hill while this Government is prepared to take \$300 from each pensioner in Canada. That is the type of justice we see in Canada and the people will realize it.

We in the NDP, as the real Opposition now in Canada, must point this out to the Canadian people. We will certainly do that in Western Canada, where I come from. Those who are watching or who read this debate must realize that the six and five program is a phony program. I see the Minister nodding his head. We have a depression in this country which was caused by the Government. It was its policies, like those of the United States and Great Britain, to bring in monetarism and put interest rates as high as possible to squeeze the economy, which have caused the economy to take a nosedive.

The Minister will say that it is an international problem. That is partly true, but Canada has the worst record, if one sees the OECD figures. There has been a drop of 5 per cent in our GNP. This country has the worst performance record.

It is Government policy to induce a depression. It has done this by making the interest rates so high that people could not afford to borrow and, therefore, would not spend. The entire economy is in a recession—some call it a depression.

How does the Government propose to recover from this recession? It proposes to do it on the backs of the working people, on the backs of old age pensioners and retired civil servants and on the backs of children. It is a gutless policy.

I have asked some people in my riding to write about this type of policy. I want to relay to the House some of those letters. I have one letter from Mrs. Margaret McNeill of East 33rd Avenue in Vancouver. She says that she is concerned about high interest rates that are going up, increases on taxes on low wage earners and the six and five limit on Old Age Security while there is no limit on prices. She knows that when she goes to the local store the prices are not restricted or controlled. However, her pension is controlled. It is a shame to fight our economic difficulties on the backs of old people.

Mr. Park of Normandy Drive in Vancouver says that he is waiting to receive his old age pension. He understands that the inflation rate is near 10 per cent. He says, "I have to ask myself, is this what I went overseas for in World War II?" I see the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Campbell) in the House. How does he feel about a letter like this from a veteran who lives in Vancouver? This man went overseas and fought for our country and is about to become a pensioner, but he has to suffer because his pension is cut back.

We are talking about people who are making less than \$9,000 a year. It is all very well for us who make \$60,000 a year to restrict the pensions of elderly Canadians. It is a shame and a scam. It is the most unjust piece of legislation we have seen in the House for a long time.

• (1125)

I could read more letters. I have in my hand a letter from Mrs. Adams who lives on Fraser Street in another part of my riding, and she wrote about her difficulties. These old people are proud people. They have fought for and served the country. They are prepared to make sacrifices and have made sacrifices for Canada. But why must we fight a Government-caused recession on the backs of these people? I say it is unjust and that eventually the young people of this country will realize that if it can be done to old age pensioners today, it can be done to them when they get old, with a Government like this.

In our society we once respected our old people. I hope that some people in society still do. However, it is certainly a mark of Government disrespect to make old people poor through a law like this.

I will conclude by saying that once I was the energy critic in my Party and I watched \$8.7 billion being earmarked for grants to oil companies. I saw grants given to Chrysler, to Maislin and to Dome Petroleum. Then we saw the money being taken away. Therefore, we in the New Democratic Party, unlike those in the Conservative Party who are so divided that they find trouble even being logical about this matter, certainly oppose the six and five principle. We will