

Supplementary Retirement Benefits Act (No. 2)

● (1650)

Mr. Denis Ethier (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, it was not my intention to participate in the debate, but I thought it was my duty to put on record my opposition to the amendment of my friend and colleague, the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) and to register my support for Bill C-133.

Your Honour will recall that at the second reading stage of this Bill, the media had reported the actions of all Hon. Members from the capital area and who, it was claimed, were most concerned because of the proximity of their ridings. I was absent during that vote and I justified my absence very well. I very seldom miss votes in the House, so I do not think the media needed to put my name in the paper and state that I did not bother to vote. It will be noticed how I vote on the Bill.

I totally discard the idea that we should be only concerned for the regions. I would hope that the Hon. Member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker), as well as my colleague, the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier, would rise above regional concerns when discussing or debating a matter as important and vital to all Canadians. I submit that Bill C-133 is just that. It is legislation which would permit us to reduce the inflation rate and, by the same token, would create an economic climate which investors will favour, and will result in the creation of more jobs for the unacceptable number of Canadians who want to work in the country.

Regrettably, the critics of the Bill never refer to the positive effects of the six and five program but, rather, only to the inflation rate in such a short period. On the contrary, the critics continue to refer to high unemployment rates and, of course, they never add the declining rate of inflation. They continue to amplify the problems of unemployment, and never do they dare refer to the much more serious problem of still higher unemployment that there might have been had we not taken the serious and courageous corrective measures such as those found in Bill C-133.

Our critics say that we are fighting inflation at the risk of increasing unemployment.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): You are beginning to understand that.

Mr. Ethier: They justify their argument by flashing the current unemployment figures. I say that this is wrong and grossly unfair.

Mr. Riis: What evidence?

Mr. Ethier: It was not so long ago that the same critics were united in requesting that we introduce measures to reduce inflation. This is what the critics were saying then: investors will not be attracted or inclined to invest and create jobs in an economy where inflation is 10 per cent, 12 per cent or 13 per cent. The same critics were even questioning how long Governments could guarantee the jobs of their civil servants in such an inflationary economy. They were seriously questioning how

long Governments could pay the pensions of their retired employees, not to mention indexation.

It was precisely in answer to those many critics from different groups in our society that our program of six and five was introduced. Indeed, it is difficult and requires courage from those of us who have the responsibility to govern during these difficult economic times the world is going through.

[Translation]

The situation is a difficult one, and we must be brave in these times which are difficult for the economies of Canada, the United States, Europe and the entire world. I said the situation was a difficult one, because we needed the support of the private sector and municipal and provincial governments to introduce this particular piece of 6 and 5 legislation, Bill C-133. Up to now, we can say that our problems have become fewer, since a number of provinces have shown that they agreed with our programs. The private sector has also indicated that it is in agreement with these austerity measures. Above all else, we must not be afraid, even if we are not always going to be very popular with our employees if we ask them to accept pay increases below the rate of inflation, and even less so with all retired public servants if we ask them to accept indexing below the inflation rate. Even the most inexperienced politician realizes that supporting such measures is not going to be very popular. However, we cannot afford to dwell on that now. We must now show that we have the courage of our convictions.

That is the message I want to bring to my colleagues here in Ottawa and to all Canadians. We must be brave. We must ask Canadians to support our efforts. If I did not have the conviction that these measures will have a positive effect on our economy, that they will attract investors and will eventually lead to creating more jobs, I would not be supporting this bill, and we would not be considering the motion put by my colleague who is worried about the measure being effective for longer than two years. I really wonder what my colleague from Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) had in mind when he proposed this amendment. Does he support Bill C-133, but does he not want it to be in effect for more than two years? If that is the case, I can assure both him and other Members on the Government side that it will not last for more than two years. Personally, I shall vote against the motion and I shall support Bill C-133.

[English]

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops-Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise a point or two in today's debate on the amendment put forward by the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) to Bill C-133. There is certainly some merit in the suggestion that it would be appropriate to set forth an expiry date for the Bill, the expiry date being December 31, 1984, so that there would at least be some certainty as to when this rather simplistic program would end. It is a rather light-hearted gesture but a positive one, despite its lightness.