

Old Age Security Act (No. 2)

is at present? Can anyone imagine going to the country on the backs of the senior citizens of Canada? I would lay dollars to doughnuts that sitting in the Government House Leader's file already is the motion of confidence that would be brought in the next day. Therefore, you can all support your Party and support your Government—and I must say I have a prejudiced view—with all its supposed strengths, but still take a stand in terms of the senior citizens of this country.

I want some Members opposite, not just one, to stand up and say they have had enough of this. That is the essence of Parliament. The Canadian Parliament is light years behind the British Parliament in terms of how it deals with matters of confidence. Every time I go overseas, I never cease to be amazed at the courage of backbenchers, whether Liberal, Labour or Conservative, and I assume members of the new party whom I have not seen in action. Their independence is amazing. The first question asked by the Prime Minister of Great Britain or the Leader of the Government is: "Will the caucus stand for this; what will the caucus say?" That is the last question asked in Canada.

This is a chance for my friends on the other side. I will ask them to do this only one more time this session, when we deal with Bill C-133, the Supplementary Retirement Benefits Act. It is one chance for them to stand up for a principle that there is a special obligation owed by the Government and Parliament as well as the people of Canada to those who are no longer part of the work force and cannot defend themselves through unions and other things. I will ask them one more time to stand up and be counted on the side of what is morally right in terms of the people whom this Government and this Parliament pledged to serve.

I thank the House for its attention. I congratulate the Hon. Member for Montreal-Sainte-Marie for rising to his feet to defend the indefensible with the eloquence of the condemned. In the event of a vote against the senior citizens of this country, those who vote had better know that they are going to be watched by a growing constituency in Canada.

● (1610)

Ms. Lynn McDonald (Broadview-Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, as this is my first speech in the House I would like to take the opportunity to pay tribute to my immediate predecessors who served here with distinction; John Gilbert, now His Honour Judge Gilbert, and Bob Rae, now the Member for York South in the Ontario legislature who is seeking to end 40-odd years of Tory rule in Ontario and establish the first Social Democratic Government in Ontario.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. McDonald: Another of my illustrious predecessors is still a Member of this House, the Hon. Member for Northumberland (Mr. Hees). I am sorry he is not in the House at the moment. He said he would be out looking for a fist fight in the corridor, and if he could make it back he would be back for his honourable mention! I share with these gentlemen the

honour of representing a very fine riding, Broadview-Greenwood, and I am deeply grateful to the citizens of that riding for having elected me in one of the more colourful, interesting and stormy by-elections in recent years on October 12.

I have chosen to make my first speech on pensions because this is a matter of utmost importance and one on which I have personally done a lot of work, both as an activist in the women's movement, a founding member of the Ontario Committee on the Status of Women, as president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, and as a member of the Ontario NDP Women's Committee. I regret that I am joining this debate not on a matter of pension reform but on cutbacks. Reforms are what we surely need, and Bill C-131 is one of the nastiest, stingiest and meanest pieces of Liberal legislation to come before this House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. McDonald: It takes money away from our pensioner population, for the most part people on low, fixed incomes, the people least able to bear the load. It is unfair in the extreme and is aimed at people who have worked and raised families, survived the depression of the 1930s and lived through difficult economic times before there was unemployment insurance. It is aimed at people who have low private pensions, if any, a great number of them, especially women, with no private pensions at all or the least possible under the Canada Pension Plan.

I want also to protest the hypocritical way in which this legislation has been introduced. The principle of the Minister of Finance's (Mr. Lalonde's) economic statement was not to "abandon the victims of the recession", not to "put the axe" to the social security system which has been decades in the making. I know pension reform has been a Government concern over the past few years. The Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) has called it the highest social policy priority of the Government. A national pensions conference was held in 1981 at which women's organizations, among others, participated and where reform was the agenda. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) himself has spoken on the issue, I recall in the election of 1979, specifically dealing with ways to improve pensions for women. I even went to a Liberal Party function to hear the address, which will show my great devotion to duty in this respect. Then what happened? Instead of reform we have cutbacks. The Minister of National Health and Welfare even has the gall to present this legislation as an invitation to voluntary heroism and self-sacrifice for the national good. I quote from her speech of November 18:

We are asking 1.1 million old age pensioners to help lead the way in the fight against inflation. I am very conscious of the sacrifice we are asking of them.

I have to stress that it is not without reluctance that we make this request.

This, Mr. Speaker, is a very devious way to refer to a Bill which in fact has nothing voluntary about it at all. If the Minister meant what she said, she would send out a letter to the pensioners concerned and ask them if they would like to lead the way in fighting inflation. They would have the option of sending a little card back saying they wanted to have their pension cheque cut in order to fight inflation to the ground. If