

Old Age Security Act

support Bill C-26 if they sincerely want, as they have always claimed, to assist our most needy citizens.

Of course, this amendment does not go far enough. However, we should not forget that this bill is only a substantial stage in the improvement of social justice and it should be emphasized that we are taking this step during a period of economic restraint.

The cost of such amendment which is supposed to come into force in September 1985 is estimated at \$190 million for the next fiscal year but it is an expenditure that we have to make even if we remain conscious of the fact that the program is only a complementary measure consistent with the comprehensive development of our social policies. Under the present circumstances, we had to accept that partial option if only for two main reasons. First and foremost, we have to give recognition to those people in the 60-to-64 age bracket who have limited financial resources, but who made a very worthwhile contribution during their more productive years by coping with the daily problems of their families.

• (1540)

Besides this strictly humane consideration in the Bill, which is aimed at a group of married people whose needs can best be defined as being urgent, the Bill also has a political and social connotation. The extension of programs already existing within the structure of our system, derived as they are from the Old Age Security Act, is the fulfilment of our political commitments as well as the reflection of our obligations towards the less fortunate among our fellow Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to make these few remarks today, and I take this opportunity to congratulate my colleague the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) on responding to the expectations of thousands of people whose daily existence is highlighted by hardships. I commend him as well for having had the courage to take action in spite of the precarious economic context, and to propose such major amendments to the social benefit structure. Most Canadians will welcome this initiative, for they realize that those changes are long overdue. The new provisions will cushion the impact of the increase in the cost of living and, in keeping with a more equitable redistribution of social benefits, give less fortunate Canadians another chance to raise their standard of living.

Mr. Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Mr. Speaker, I have listened attentively to the fairly well written speech which was read by the Hon. Member for Duvernay (Mr. Della Noce) and which, obviously, was mostly aimed at praising the government for the legislation it is about to adopt. I have no basic objection to the fact that the Hon. Member wants to support Bill C-26. He sits on the government side. However, his speech had a major flaw in that he has failed to mention this bill's major shortcoming, namely, that single, separated or divorced persons and those who are not widowed will not be eligible for these benefits. I wonder whether the Hon. Member has no such people in his riding and whether he has not been pressured by

such people who feel treated as second class citizen because they are excluded from the benefits of Bill C-26.

Mr. Della Noce: Mr. Speaker, I should like to reply to my hon. colleague. First of all, my riding of Duvernay is not so poor or unorganized as all that. One is fortunate to have the privilege of representing such a riding. I want to indicate to the Hon. Member, however, that I have not had many opportunities to discuss this issue with my constituents. I shall certainly discuss it with them, and that is the reason I am interested in this bill.

Yet, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that in view of the means at our disposal, it is a beginning and a step in the right direction. I indicated in my remarks that this was not yet quite enough, that this is only a beginning which we will be able to improve upon with the cooperation of all our colleagues, and I see an Hon. Member behind him who is very much interested in this issue. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, this requires money, and as soon as we have some . . . I agree that we should not penalize anybody.

[English]

Mr. Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I was interested to hear the critical tone of the Hon. Member with respect to the role of the NDP on pensions. I wonder if the Hon. Member has taken enough interest in the history of his Party to know that in 1926, when the first pension was introduced, the Conservative Leader of the day, Arthur Meighen, remarked that it was a social evil and that we would all come to regret the notion of pensions and providing income for the elderly. That is the historical inheritance of his Party. It is an attitude which has not completely disappeared.

The Hon. Member acknowledged that there was more work to be done. I regret that he was not more specific. There are a number of areas in which the Government could have acted. One area which comes to mind is the improvements which could be made to the pensions for CNR and CPR pensioners. We are all aware that the Standing Committee on Transport is looking into this matter and will either have a subcommittee or the whole committee look at the question of railway pensions.

Time and time again CN pensioners have made a good case for having the status of their pension fund, and the need to be able to get more out of that fund, reviewed by the Government. CN pensioners have received support for that stand from Members on all sides of the House. The same is true of the position which was taken by the Canadian Pacific Railway Pensioners' Association. CP pensioners also need to have the status of their pensions reviewed. Many pensioners who retired 10 or 20 years ago are in bad shape with respect to the ability of their pensions being able to match the purchasing power that those pensions once enabled them to have.

I know that the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Assiniboine (Mr. McKenzie) has given support to that cause in the past. I hope, now that he is on the government side, that he will have the opportunity to make representations and to get action with respect to Canadian Pacific pensioners and Canadian National pensioners. Over the years those pensioners contributed a great