

On clause 1—*Short title.*

● (2020)

**Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West):** Madam Chairman, there are just a very few observations I want to make about this bill. As one of the declining number of veterans in this House I can understand the motivation of the department in putting forward this particular bill. The minister full well knows my attitude, and I am sure his officials do as well, toward what in effect is one of the main thrusts of this bill. It is one that I have felt was a retrograde step in the total thrust of government legislation over the past few years.

It had been the rule that in order to recognize a certain status for concubines of seven years, or common law marriages of seven years, this would be equated to a legal marriage and that any benefits flowing to survivors under superannuation or compensation schemes of whatever nature under general federal legislation would apply to such concubines and common law wives.

We know there were some cases of hardship here and there, but I would say that the mood of the Canadian people in the late 1960's had tolerated a change from this status; now in the mid seventies that has changed considerably. Most of us in our generation believe the moral and the legal effects and consequences of marriage lie at the root of our social structure, in this country and in most other countries, and we do not think that this should be lightly cast aside. Somehow or other it got to be a popular idea that a shack-up of three years was enough—

**An hon. Member:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West):** Would the hon. member just contemplate. Look at this legislation and I will tell the hon. member, who is pretty junior in years, of scores of cases of the wives of veterans—

**Mrs. Sauvé:** Junior but smart.

**Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West):** The hon. minister has no knowledge of this because she has never been over the track. Perhaps the hon. lady has not had an opportunity of having—

[Translation]

**Mr. Roy (Laval):** You should write your speeches, it would be quicker.

**Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West):** Let the hon. member for Laval mark my words. I shall not put up with lessons in the House.

**Mr. Roy (Laval):** Please, read your speech.

**Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West):** No, I won't. You do read your speeches. I wish to add this, Madam Chairman: I hope that those hon. members who are jeering tonight and think this issue is a big joke will receive telephone calls or visits from middle-aged ladies.

**Miss Bégin:** I rise on a question of privilege, Madam Chairman.

### Veterans Insurance

**The Assistant Deputy Chairman:** Does the hon. parliamentary secretary rise on a question of privilege or on a point of order?

**Miss Bégin:** On a question of privilege, Madam Chairman. With your permission, Madam Chairman, I would like to ask if the hon. opposition member has accused hon. women members on this side of the House of being middle-aged. I did not quite understand. I fail to see how this is related to the veterans' legislation.

**The Assistant Deputy Chairman:** Order, please. The hon. member for Edmonton West.

**Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West):** Madam Chairman, I wish to tell the clever Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Miss Bégin) that had she followed the debate, she would understand that I am referring to veterans' wives. If she is touchy about her age, that is her problem not mine. But there are women who call and tell us about their husbands who deserted them because they were attracted by younger and more attractive women. They have raised children, a family, and their husbands are veterans who are receiving a pension or certain benefits under the veterans' program. In such cases, the problem arises as to who is to be considered as the surviving spouse of this veteran. Previously, if there had been a broken home, if there had been not a divorce but a legal separation from bed and board or simply voluntary separation between husband and wife, the right of the common law wife could be established only after seven years of living together. Nowadays, three years are enough. That is not very easy to buy oneself a pension! And what about the wife who has been deserted, tossed on the scrap heap of society? Should we tell her as I had to tell somebody: Listen, Madam, your fate is to rely on welfare. For so many people here in the House, the eventual answer is: Madam, go and apply for welfare. Yet this woman has raised a veteran's children, she has shared his home as well as his joys and miseries for 20 or 25 years. But she is put aside after barely three years. And what are three years? The wife is not entitled to the survivor pension, it is his mistress, his concubine who will get it. It is very simple!

But what did we read in this legislation? Do we know it? What is the principle proposed by this government? It is the same principle that we adopted and I voted last year against amendments to the legislation concerning several programs for veterans. But I think—

[English]

I make a plea to members of this House: why do we have to sap the social structure of our society?

● (2030)

[Translation]

**Miss Bégin:** Times have changed.

**Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West):** The hon. parliamentary secretary tells me that times have changed. Listen to see if she is in favour of concubinage—

**The Assistant Deputy Chairman:** Order, please. The hon. member for St. Boniface on a question of privilege.

**Some hon. Members:** Sit down!