

The Economy

● (1502)

I heard a while ago the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) refer to the spouses' allowance. He never mentioned the spouse. If you noticed, as the member for Roberval did, he mentioned the wife. The allowance is not only meant for the wife between 60 and 65, but for the spouse, either husband or wife. Then, the husband remains without a pension if he is 62 years old when his wife dies at 68.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): How many are there?

Mr. Béchard: I will count them and let you know next week. The member for Winnipeg North Centre added that the spouse was left with nothing when the Department of National Health and Welfare pays welfare allowances in every province to all needy individuals. The federal share of those allowances is 50 per cent, thanks to a policy implemented by this government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but his time has expired. But he could go on if there is unanimous consent.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): The hon. member for Bonaventure-Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

Mr. Béchard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for that generosity as well as my colleagues. As I was saying, those who are in need, whether they be widows or widowers, whether they live alone or not, are entitled, whether they are spouses—because today you don't call those people widowers or widows, you call them spouses—but the spouse has the right to apply to the provincial department and he or she will have his or her pension or allowance set by the Quebec department of social affairs, and I repeat that this social allowance that senior citizens in Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, all across Canada will be receiving is shared on a 50 per cent basis by the Government of Canada. And that is made possible once again, as the guaranteed income supplement, thanks to the measures passed by this bad government, according to the opposition.

So tomorrow I would like those who want to cut the budget by \$2 billion to tell us exactly what they are going to do to cut it. What they are going to do, well, those who receive social security pensions or allowances will find out because it is already rumoured, and we can see the reaction, that certain things are going to be cut in those social security measures. You cannot go and get it elsewhere. So, that is the program that is not being talked about openly but which will be implemented if by misfortune the official opposition were to be called upon to form the government of this country.

Spouses over 65 and the others between 60 and 65 get a maximum allowance of \$249 a month. Family allowances are other social security measures passed, it must be acknowledged by a Liberal government and increased by a Liberal government, by Parliament, but at the instigation of a Liberal government, a good government. Family allowances are a very important source of revenue for Canadians. In 1967, they amounted to \$6 a month per child under nine. Nowadays the average is \$25.68 per child.

I would like to see the opposition try and advocate the reduction of these allowances in their constituencies. Now let us talk about the much criticized unemployment insurance. It went from \$26 a week in 1967 to the present maximum of \$160 a week for the unemployed with dependants. Allowances for veterans and the handicapped have also increased considerably. I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to thank the Minister of Veteran Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) for his active support of veterans.

● (1512)

As did my colleague from Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), I would also like to beg him to improve the lot of veterans' widows who are not entitled to anything when their husbands die unless they are getting a pension of at least 48 per cent. So this afternoon, since to ask is to receive, I am asking the Minister of Veterans Affairs to consider that matter, to think of it even more seriously so that the lot of veterans' widows can be improved considerably.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, when some are tempted to yield to pressures and reduce those programs, we must give credit where credit is due, that is to the government, to various departments, because they took those measures. The other side can laugh but when they praise what a Progressive Conservative government has done in some provinces, they hold it up as a model.

We are trying to say what this government has done and I know that it has made mistakes: *Errare humanum est*, to err is human, and since the government is made up of human beings, just like the opposition, nothing is perfect on this earth. We are only trying to say that this government took those measures to make sure that the less advantaged people in our society will not suffer an unfair setback. Here again, I believe our society is much more just than it was ten years ago with all those measures that ensure the well-being of all citizens even though they are not all well off yet. Those who say that Canada is less prosperous today than it was ten years ago are closing their eyes to the facts as the members of the official opposition and others are doing. The hon. member for Rimouski (Mr. Allard) is shaking his head. He says it is clear to him. We will see later when he takes the floor.

While as I said, the real per capita income rose nearly 52 per cent in Canada over the 1968-1977 period, the increase