

*Old Age Security Act*

This allowance is not meant for the widowed, otherwise we would have no need to introduce a bill. He is a lawyer and I am a "people's lawyer". So, I imagine that I have a better understanding of the world. At the present time spouse allowances are being paid when one spouse gets the Old Age Security Pension and the Guaranteed Income Supplement and the other, between 60 and 64, is eligible. We are the ones who introduced the spouse allowance and it was not meant for the widowed persons. Moreover when he speaks of the Opposition's role, let me tell him that without the work of the Opposition Members, both Liberal and NDP, and of certain groups, the Tories would have put an end to the universality of old age pensions.

[English]

**Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North):** Mr. Speaker, in my years as a Member of Parliament I have not very often spoken on the question of pensions because until the election of 1984 my friend and colleague, the former Hon. Member for Winnipeg North Centre, was the one Member among all Members of Parliament, and certainly of our Party, who spoke most often on this issue. He put the case for improving the lot of senior citizens, of those who were retired, if not every day, certainly it was every week.

I am pleased to participate in this debate. The pension plan was begun in Canada in 1926 because of the efforts of the then labour Members of Parliament from the constituencies of Winnipeg North Centre, then represented by the Hon. Stanley Knowles, and Winnipeg North, then represented by Mr. Heaps. After the election in 1926, no Party had a majority, so those two Members wrote to the then Leader of the Conservative Party, Mr. Meighen, and the then Leader of the Liberal Party, Mr. King. They said that they would support whoever of them promised to bring in a pension plan for retired people. Mr. King responded to that proposal and brought in a pension plan. It was \$20 per month for people aged 70, with a means test. It was a very small beginning, but it was the beginning.

The pensions of retired people were very low for many years. It took continuous agitation by members of my Party and its predecessor, the CCF, and the threat of elections to get Governments to improve pensions. In the 1960s we urged the then Liberal Prime Minister, Mr. Pearson, to increase pensions to \$75 per month. Mr. Pearson was loathe to do it because he said that the country could not afford it. From my experience in Parliament I do not think we ever made a more important improvement in the lives of people than when we indexed pensions during the minority Government of 1972-74.

**Mr. Dick:** It was a Conservative initiative.

**Mr. Orlikow:** I hear the Hon. Member. It was a Liberal minority Government and the New Democratic Party—

**Mr. Dick:** Bob Stanfield suggested it first.

**Mr. Orlikow:** It was NDP Members of Parliament who told the then Liberal Government that unless it brought in the indexation of pensions, it would be defeated. Indexing pensions

or tying them to cost of living increases has been the salvation of pensioners. Without it pensioners would still be waiting from year to year or would still be running hat in hand to whichever Party formed the Government to obtain the improvements they needed.

We have indicated quite clearly that we will support the Bill, although it meets only a small part of the needs of older citizens. It extends the benefits now provided to elderly Canadians to widows and widowers in the age group of 60 years to 65 years. That is an improvement. We support it. As was indicated by members of my Party who spoke earlier, this has been advocated by us for years and it was ignored and rejected by previous Liberal Governments. I find it passing strange that Liberal Members have risen during this debate to ask the Conservatives why they are only taking the first step and not taking the second step to cover people between the ages of 60 and 65 who were never married or are separated. The Liberals would not even take the first step when they formed the Government. Now they are saying to the Conservative Government that it should take the second step. We are where we have always been. We say that the people between the ages of 60 and 65 need to be covered by these programs, not just those who are widowed and widowers, but all those in that age group, including those who were never married or who are separated.

● (1640)

The problems of older women include poverty, loneliness, poor health and poor housing. Increasing the pension as we are doing only meets a small part of the problems and difficulties of older Canadians. The Canadian Council on Social Development estimated that the poverty line for a single person in 1982 was \$7,925 a year. All those whose income was below that live in poverty.

We know that 600,000 older Canadians receive income below the poverty line and that more than half of them have incomes at least 25 per cent below that. Women are much more likely to be included in that group than men. Very often women have no pension at all, no insurance and no income except welfare because they have only worked in their homes raising their families.

I am sure I am not the only Member of Parliament who received letters on this. Approximately two years ago I received a letter from a woman in my constituency. I want to place part of that letter on the record. I quote:

I am over 60 and a widow. We did not pay into the pension fund as we did not earn much. My husband was sick for quite some time. He died one month before his sixty-fifth birthday in 1975. I was told we have to draw the line somewhere. I happen to be on the wrong side of the line.

She could not get the assistance we felt she was then entitled to because the Liberals did not believe the country could afford it. We get the same argument today from the Conservative Government, saying "We cannot afford now to give this benefit we are giving to widows and widowers to people who were never married or who are separated". Women nearly always worked at jobs in the lowest paying sectors of society. Almost always the employers provided no pension plan. Our