

*Old Age Security Act*

not be stigmatized for the rest of their lives, but should benefit now from the provisions of the legislation.

As I said, this is why, Mr. Speaker, we will try to convince them during the upcoming weeks, we will try to win them to our side. Indeed, backbenchers like the Hon. Member for Charlevoix, instead of trying to rationalize this Government's Bill, should tell the Minister: "We were elected to be fair and just." He should tell him that the separated, divorced or single people in his constituency also want this benefit and need it. This is what he should be doing. Not that I feel any urging to repeat what was said by the Hon. Member for Champlain (Mr. Champagne). But hearing the speeches made up to this day, that is the impression which one gets from the work of some Members. As we know, the Hon. Member for Champlain did not mean it as a compliment when he said his colleagues were "deuces of spades".

But I am anxious to hear him rise and tell the Minister of National Health and Welfare that the errors in the legislation should absolutely be rectified. I feel certain we would have a unanimous response from the House if tomorrow the Government were to introduce such an amendment. He could even make sure that this would be implemented now rather than in September, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

**Mr. Sergio Marchi (York West):** Mr. Speaker, I too am very pleased to take part in today's debate on Bill C-26. This Bill is indeed an important piece of legislation, aimed to extending the protection of the spousal allowance program to all widows and widowers between the ages of 60 and 64. As has already been well documented, the proposal would affect approximately 85,000 Canadians and thus add to the 94,000 Canadians who are currently already enjoying these benefits.

It is on the whole, I believe, a positive step which builds on the strength, the vision and the courage of legislation initiated by a former Liberal Government in 1975. In this regard I congratulate the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp). As a new Member of Parliament in this House, I have come to respect his abilities as a parliamentarian and, perhaps more important, his caring attitude as an individual.

Much has been said in this House about Bill C-26, but I would like to focus briefly on three important realities which I believe flow from this piece of legislation. The first is that of the 85,000 recipients, 72,000 or 87 per cent are women. Second, this Bill declares as ineligible over 80,000 Canadians between the ages of 60 and 64 who were never married, are separated or divorced. Third, there are countless couples between the ages of 60 and 64 who are facing severe financial pressures largely because their employment marketability is severely undermined by the traditions of our society. Their concerns are also unanswered by this Bill.

These are important realities which Bill C-26 does not address. The obvious question that Canadians are asking is, why not? While the Bill, I repeat, needs to be applauded for what it will accomplish, the legislation also speaks quite loudly

about the matters that it does not advocate or will accomplish. Therefore, as parliamentarians, while we need to recognize the advantages offered by this legislation to Canadians, we cannot allow its limitations to be overlooked or forgotten.

We need to ask ourselves about the plight of Canadians who are between the crucial ages of 60 and 65 and find themselves alone with little financial security. We also need to come to grips with the harsh realities facing women within this age bracket. We need to understand the many faces of poverty and admit that they do exist with all too much frequency in our communities and across this country. We need to face those realities and we need to act. We therefore need to discuss and subsequently implement matters of pension reform, matters of homemakers' pensions and improved benefits for part-time workers.

In his speech on this Bill the Minister of National Health and Welfare spoke about poverty and the fact that widows in particular are among the poorest in Canada. He then touched upon the employment shortfalls:

Let's not kid ourselves: in most instances, the 60 to 64-year old widow is not the one the personnel manager will hire. Why hire someone who might have only a few years until retirement while there are other young and perhaps better educated people competing for job openings available today?

The Minister was correct in his analysis. It is shared, I believe, by all Members of this House, but the scope of this analysis was all too narrow. The single, separated or divorced 60 to 64-year old is also fighting for economic survival. The single, separated or divorced 60 to 64-year old also faces employment discriminations. There are also 60 to 64-year old couples who face increasing difficulties. The situation where the husband or the wife is laid off and the salary of the other partner becomes a single salary and quite inadequate to make ends meet, also warrants a concerted effort on our part. This Bill does not make that effort.

● (1200)

Just last week I visited a couple faced with such a dilemma. The husband is 62 years old and has worked all of his life in construction. He was recently laid off but construction work has been his only employment experience. Thus he is seeking a similar job. His problem, and he realizes it, is his age. He too is the first to admit that perhaps a younger person would be more physically suited to that position. His wife, who is one year younger, has worked for 30 years cleaning and scrubbing other people's floors. She too is at the point of being physically worn out and she too feels that it would perhaps be appropriate for her to step aside in favour of a younger person in need of work. The question, however, is how can she do so?

I am not suggesting that this is the definitive experience of all Canadians. However, there are too many similar real-life cases. There certainly are enough such cases to justify a change and enough for us to realize that people in the age group of 60 to 64 merit special and careful attention from Parliament and indeed society.

During the recent federal election campaign and subsequent visits and discussions with my constituents in York West, the