

*Old Age Security Act*

Montreal-Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart) strongly object to his personal salary increase effective as of January 1st of this year. Never! He has not uttered a word in that regard.

About his question concerning separated people, as I said a moment ago, Mr. Speaker, obviously we would prefer to extend this allowance to them as well, and we are working towards that. However, circumstances are such that we have to consider the situation as it comes. I would like to point out to the Hon. Member that he and his colleagues have had every opportunity in the past, having been in power not just for six months but for a good many years, to amend the Old Age Security Act and eliminate all those discriminatory provisions he has been referring to. That benefit was already extended to the widow under 65 years of age, providing her husband had been receiving it. However others did not get it. So that was discriminatory, according to his own way of thinking. And speaking about women who are separated from their husbands as opposed to widows, you know full well, Mr. Speaker, that short of knowing the future or being instrumental in that decision, widowhood is a state that occurs unexpectedly, without warning. It is an act of God which is beyond one's control. Things are altogether different with those who are divorced or separated. I do not know what the Hon. Member for Montreal-Sainte-Marie is referring to, whether he is personally in this situation or friends of his are, but one thing is sure, our ultimate goal is to improve the situation of those people. But right now, we must choose our priorities. Considering the limited financial resources available to us at this time as a result of the situation we have inherited, we believe that those widows and widowers should benefit without delay from this spousal allowance, even before those who are separated or divorced from their spouses.

**Mr. Malépart:** The Hon. Member is entirely mistaken when he says that I never discussed my salary. When I was a Member of the Quebec National Assembly in 1973, there was a debate on a salary increase, and, my colleague could bear me out, when the vote was held I recall that the six P.Q. Members at that time acted like hypocrites in voting against, only to pocket the increase afterwards. What did I do? I took the salary increase cheque voted under Robert Bourassa and gave it to community groups in my riding. That answers his first question.

Mr. Speaker, I find it shocking to hear him say a widow is more sorrowful. He does not know anything about this legislation. He says that one becomes a widow overnight. Mr. Speaker, there are widowed men and women who have been in that situation for ten years and will become entitled to the benefit; this will not come as a surprise to them. As for divorced people, divorce is no more surprising, people are not unhappy. As for single people—Come on, stop joking! Since when should we draft a social legislation on the basis that “this particular group of people is more distressed”? That's going back to the 1880s!

• (1630)

I would like to know what the Hon. Member thinks, and whether he still maintains that the woman who has been a widow for the past ten years is in for a surprise on September 1.

**Mr. Tremblay (Lotbinière):** Mr. Speaker, even if it means repeating myself, again, it has nothing to do with the number of years that one has been a widow or a widower. I simply said that one becomes a widower or a widow through the whims of fate, it is a factual matter. It is not the same for people who are separated or divorced, even though again we are aware of their status and we are concerned about them. When the Minister introduced or tabled the Bill, he actually said that. We want to correct this situation eventually but at present, we give priority to widows and widowers who need it. As a Government, we have set that priority just as the people have set the priority for the Progressive Conservative Party to lead the country and for the Liberals to be in opposition.

**Mr. Tardif (Richmond-Wolfe):** Mr. Speaker, first I should like to tell the Hon. Member for Lotbinière (Mr. Tremblay) that I would gladly do without the 2 or 3 per cent raise we received in January if he is ready and willing to vote against that bill.

Second, I totally agree with the Hon. Member that this legislation could be wonderful in theory if it were fair and equitable. But in its present form, it is perfectly scandalous and totally discriminatory. I believe the Hon. Member is a lawyer. Although I do not have any figures, he will probably be able to demonstrate that separated or divorced women are probably in a worse financial situation than most of the widows. What should you answer to these separated or divorced women when they ask you why they are not eligible?

**Mr. Tremblay (Lotbinière):** Mr. Speaker, you have been kind enough to recognize me again. I will make the best of it although it is not enough to repeat oneself to get through to the opposition.

I would remind the Hon. Member that even before this Bill is adopted, our legislation contains a provision granting the spouse allowance to widows under 65 years of age whose husband received the old age pension. In a way, it is a discriminatory measure according to either the French or the English definition of the word, but it should be considered in the context of its social and legal definition. My hon. friend seems to be a bit confused, and it is quite normal since some Hon. Members are boasting and claiming that they are ready to give up their 2 per cent. But they have been getting it for a few months, two months to be exact, but as soon as we push them a bit, they suddenly agree to give it up. But it is too late and too little!

**Mr. Malépart:** Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member should first understand what is the currently available spouse allowance.