

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is both immoral and discriminatory. I am happy to see that the Progressive Conservative Party realizes that widows and widowers in need must be helped. I am happy to see that 85,000 Canadians, most of them women, will be able to benefit from a measure that will give them some very real assistance. I find it unacceptable that this bill would make second-class citizens out of 80,000 needy Canadians who are single or divorced.

When I read the bill, I could not believe that such a thing could be possible in 1985 in a civilized country with laws forbidding discrimination. Should these 80,000 Canadians, most of whom are women, be punished because of their marital status? Personally, Mr. Speaker, I find this legislation even more offensive because I had the honour to succeed, as a Member of Parliament, the one person who did the most to establish the principle of equity and social justice in this House, the former Liberal Member of Parliament and Minister of National Health and Welfare, the Hon. Monique Bégin, who fought for years to assert the rights of women, senior citizens, the poor and the handicapped, without any distinction based on marital status, race or religion. This Government is bringing us back tens and even hundreds of years, while the Hon. Monique Bégin, through her tireless work, did everything to ensure that Canada would have a progressive social system adapted to the needs of its people. After dancing to the waltz of universality, the Conservative Government has introduced a bill based on discriminatory criteria.

I would be remiss in my duties and I would disregard the example left to us by the Hon. Monique Bégin, if I did not denounce vigorously the bill before the House.

Mr. Speaker, I repeat that all people, whether they are single, divorced or widowed, have the same rights. Living alone is often a hardship for senior citizens. Are we going to add to this a discrimination based on past marital status? Mr. Speaker, nothing can justify the discriminatory aspects of this bill. The Liberal Party of Canada will not allow the Conservative Government to ease its conscience while forgetting the real problems! The Liberal Party of Canada will always fight for equity, social justice and the respect of the individual! This bill must be amended as soon as possible.

● (1240)

In 1985, Canadian men and women cannot tolerate such obvious and unfair discrimination. All senior citizens between the ages of 60 and 65 who meet certain income requirements, must become eligible as soon as possible to the benefits provided by Bill C-26.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Questions and comments. The Hon. Member for Laval (Mr. Ricard).

Mr. Ricard: Mr. Speaker, I was listening very closely when the Hon. Member for Saint-Léonard-Anjou (Mr. Gagliano) made his comments, and in my view he is genuinely concerned

about a certain group of people, and definitely very familiar with the proposed legislation. There is one thing I would like to know, further to his comments. Since he also admits there are good things in this legislation, I would then like to know whether he is going to vote for, or against it.

Mr. Gagliano: Mr. Speaker, of course I acknowledged in my remarks that the Government was in fact helping widowers and widows. Where I disagree, Mr. Speaker, and I think I have said this, is on the discriminatory nature of the legislation, because at least 80,000 single or divorced Canadians would not be entitled to the allowance proposed in Bill C-26. We support the principle of Bill C-26. We are going to fight until we can manage to have it amended, so that those other people are included. But, of course, we could not vote against this kind of initiative.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): The Hon. Member for Montreal-Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart).

Mr. Malépart: Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleague the same question I asked following a letter I sent to the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney). And to fully understand what this is all about, when the Right Hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) claim that this legislation is aimed at the people most in need . . . I see two ladies here, and I think they will surely appreciate the importance of the matter.

I would like to refer to three cases in my constituency, the same as in every other constituency in Canada. I have Mrs. Lebrun—

Mrs. Mailly: Mr. Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Order, please. The Government Deputy Whip (Mrs. Mailly).

Mrs. Mailly: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the concerns of the Hon. Member for Montreal-Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart), but his contribution looks like just another speech, and since this Bill is dear to us all, I would ask him this, with the best feelings of friendship in this House: Could we proceed with the debate, in order that the Bill may go to committee as soon as possible, and could we let our colleague deliver his speech now because he must leave for home?

Mr. Malépart: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): The Hon. Member for Montreal-Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart) on a point of order.

Mr. Malépart: My point of order is that I do not feel we have to rush this Bill through, because it is only due to come into force on September 1st, and today is February 8th. It is therefore my view that we have all the time we need to discuss the point of order, and it is a Member's right and privilege to express his views in the House of Commons.