

Mr. Lalonde: I accept that this is a problem which arises, but not only for people age 60 or 65. The same problem arises in respect of people age 55, 45, the handicapped, and those out of work. It arises in respect of single people, bachelors, and widows of whatever age if they cannot find employment.

The approach of the government is to establish a guaranteed income program which would take care of all these cases whatever the age, the condition, or whether those involved are married or single. As I have mentioned, we have taken an interim step to take care of an obvious unfairness and deficiency in our old age security system. This is one step, and there are more to come. I want to advise the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, however, that these will not be universal programs. They will be selective programs and will not be limited to persons of age 65. We want to have a social security system in this country to take care adequately of all people in need whatever their age or their condition. These are the objectives of the government.

The hon. member for Victoria (Mr. McKinnon) referred to this bill and made various comments about it. Comments were made concerning common law marriages. I must say that I take seriously some of the comments made. I would refer hon. members to the text of the bill and the definition of "spouse". They will find in effect that this provision is comparable to the provisions in other bills. I would remind hon. members that there is no intention on the part of the government or of parliament to pass a moral judgment about this or that particular situation in life.

I would remind hon. members that common law marriages have been accepted for quite a period in Canada both at the provincial and federal levels in respect of rights. This also applies to social security rights. So, we must look at this question in a rather less partisan and phony way than the way in which it has been argued here today. I am sure we will have an opportunity to discuss this matter further before the committee.

To return to the question raised by the hon. member for Victoria, may I say I can understand his argument but I cannot understand his conclusion when he referred to this bill as a mean bill. I think that is the expression he used. Well, this may be a mean bill, but it is a mean bill which is providing about \$100 million in benefits to our senior citizens. If this is a mean bill, I would say that the opposition party when it was in office for six years did not introduce one single bill in the field of old age security that involved such an amount. I say that in the six years in which the Tories were in office the additions in respect of old age security did not come out to the total amount covered in benefits under this so-called small or mean bill.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): But it was worth more at that time.

Mr. McKinnon: What about inflation? I referred to this as a mean bill for the same reason the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) objected to it. It is mean because it does not cover widows and spinsters.

Mr. Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I think I have answered the hon. member's argument. I have explained the rationale of

Old Age Security Act

this bill. I do not want to go into the details at this particular stage. The bill will be considered in committee.

● (1650)

I will conclude by thanking once more all hon. members who have participated in this debate today for their contributions. I think many points have been made on this subject with some vigour, but this is what we can expect in the House of Commons. If there were no vigour here, I do not know where else we could find it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the minister. This week, I asked a very serious question to the parliamentary secretary. I will repeat it to the minister because Mr. Speaker had invited me to do so at this time.

There are some clarifications I would like to have. Suppose a spouse of 62 who benefits from the legislation because his or her spouse is 65 years old or more. Suppose the elder dies; what happens to the survivor, who is younger and is not yet 65 years old?

Mr. Lalonde: I thought I answered this question this morning again, when I made my opening speech in the debate on second reading. I indicated then that the object of the bill being to cover only the couple forced to live on the pension of one person only, as the case you mentioned, if the widow or the widower does not qualify directly, it is obvious that the payment of the special allowance stops and, if the person is in dire circumstances, he or she comes under public welfare, to which the federal government contributes on a 50 per cent basis with the provinces.

[*English*]

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I may ask the minister a question. What the last hon. member to speak raised is very interesting and it is a matter that has concerned me. Has the minister any figure he might be able to give us as to what it might cost the government to remedy what I think is a defect, the matter which has just been raised? I think it is a defect in practical terms. The legal argument that the minister has given I can understand, but in real, practical terms it could be a great difficulty for a family caught in that situation as described by the hon. member, when they are caught in the reversion as the result of the death of one spouse. Does the minister know what it would cost?

Mr. Lalonde: I am in no position to give an answer at this time. Any answer would have to be very rough estimate. I can try to make a rough guess, and I will provide that information to the committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Penner): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said motion?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I thank those who have waited to discuss my bill, Bill C-249,