

Social Policy

example, if it were not for the government's incredible record of waste. This government wastes millions of dollars of taxpayers' money annually. Some of the wastage we have seen in the last year has been highlighted by the Auditor General's report.

How many spouses could have been maintained with the \$2 million the government gave to the nuclear sales agent, Shaul Eisenberg, for services never rendered; with the \$17 million that has been committed to renting unoccupied excess property in Vancouver at a cost of \$241,000 per year until the year 2045; with the \$95 million in overpayments made by the Unemployment Insurance Commission; or with the \$4.5 million paid for rental of unoccupied and, in some cases, unfinished office space in Ottawa in 1975-76? Even those few items I have listed total some \$120 million of taxpayers' money which was wasted and which could well have gone toward continuing the spouse's allowance for those who have had it cut off.

The government's spending habits are notorious and I will not take any more time listing them. I could go on and on. But I do have to say that it grieves me deeply that the \$10,000 in fees that the government is paying without batting an eyelash to cover the damages in a libel suit for one of its tactless ministers, the Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Goyer), would provide for payment of the spouse's allowance to one Canadian widow for the years between age 60 and 65 for which she would be eligible.

It is this kind of extravagance and waste that highlights the meanness of the government's social policy toward elderly widows. It is this kind of extravagance in relation to a select few at the expense of the ordinary Canadian that highlights the government's insensitivity to the problems of the poor and elderly who, for the large part, are one and the same group.

The withdrawal of spouse's allowance is a mean and cruel practice. It victimizes those who least deserve it—people, mostly women, who have devoted years of their lives to the service of family and community. They do not deserve to suffer the double loss of their spouse and their income. This heartless practice, which represents a minimal saving in the phenomenal national budget and which is money already allocated, should be discontinued immediately. The surviving spouse should be allowed to keep the spouse's allowance. Surely the government should not look to the death of the elder marriage partner in order to achieve a "windfall profit".

I want to emphasize that the motion I am putting forward is just a preliminary step toward easing the financial burden of the elderly in this country. It does not cover single, divorced or separated people in the same age group and it could be seen as creating further inequities. I would emphasize, however, that the inequities are already there in abundance and that this one step would serve to remove at least one of the inequities.

Surely nothing can be more unjust than taking away the small pension that is a person's sole livelihood. To not give a pension to a particular group is one inequity; but to take a pension away is surely a greater one. Even members of the

[Miss MacDonald.]

government opposite must be able to perceive this injustice. I implore them to take immediate action to correct it.

[Translation]

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to what the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) had to say on the Progressive Conservative motion, namely that the social policy of the government contains dire inequities for elderly Canadians and that the practice of terminating the spouse's allowance after the death of the older marriage partner is cruel and unjust.

I would like to point out the great intellectual dishonesty of the hon. member's intervention. Instead of dealing with senior citizens' problems, she took the opportunity to make a political and partisan review of many other points and she was allowed to do so by Mr. Speaker, while standing orders of this House preclude my challenging or disputing her arguments. She referred to the Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Goyer), inflation and many other matters and I am not allowed to disprove her statements pursuant to our standing orders.

However, I would like to take on a point which I think—

Mr. McGrath: Read the motion!

Miss Bégin: That is what I did, I read the motion but, apparently, the Progressive Conservative party did not have enough to say on this motion and felt compelled to talk mostly about the sun instead of limiting itself to the motion. As concerns the status of women, I wish to answer a point raised by the hon. member that has nothing to do with the spouse's allowance but casts serious reflections on the actions of this government, and I find it quite dishonest. I am talking about income tax circular No. 78-3 dated February 27, 1978. I will comment on it in relation to the status of women, Mr. Speaker, and I think that you will allow me to say a few words because the subject was brought to my attention similarly when I was Minister of National Revenue.

I particularly remember AFEAS which does a very good job on issues of concern to women and families and has 38,000 members in Quebec. I also remember groups from the Vancouver Committee on the Status of Women and many Canadian associations, namely women's associations, which came to see me and inform me about a situation that seemed unfair to me at the time, that is the possibility of getting a tax exemption number for charitable donations. The officials of the department explained to me that according to tradition, tax exemption registration for charitable donations was given to associations with medical, educational, cultural purposes, sport associations and others of the same type. According to precedents going back to Elizabeth I, on the other hand, any political action prevents an organization from obtaining tax concessions. In other words, if the *Association des femmes diplômées des universités*, the National Action Committee of