

*Old Age Security Act*

conomic hardships which are experienced by the older people in the labour force. However, to criticize the Bill for not solving this distinct, larger and very much more complicated issue, represents a failure to recognize that the point of Bill C-26 is to provide a solution for one very serious and specific problem. As only a few members of the Opposition have suggested in their remarks, this piece of legislation can only be judged in terms of how effectively it relates to its clearly stated goal. To do otherwise is irresponsible and does a great disservice to the thousands of needy Canadians who will benefit directly from the implementation of this amendment.

In the remainder of my remarks I shall attempt to describe the natural scope of the legislation and explain why Bill C-26 effectively targets financial assistance to one particular group which has a legitimate need.

The Government is trying to adjust the spouse's allowance provision of the Old Age Security Act. Opposition Parties should examine that fairly obvious point more closely. The purpose of the Bill is to amend or correct imperfections in an existing piece of legislation. Since the part of the existing legislation which is affected is the section that establishes the spouse's allowance, it is logical and consistent for us to address our remarks to the difficulties faced by a particular group in society, namely spouses. Clearly, divorced and single people are not spouses, although they have problems similar to those experienced by widows. However, enough differences remain to justify the decision of the Government to try to reduce the particular difficulties encountered by widows and widowers of advancing years.

● (1710)

If members of the other Parties choose to continue using the very negative sounding word "discrimination" to describe this legislation, I will be disappointed. This would reveal an insensitivity to the unique position which the spouse has in the marriage and in society. Our society is changing very quickly, Mr. Speaker, for better or for worse. The role of the family and of the parents is no longer as clear as it once was. This point applies particularly to mothers. In my riding of London East over the past five years, the number of men in the workforce has decreased marginally while the number of working mothers has jumped by well over 10 per cent. There is no alternative for this Government but to recognize that it must adapt its legislation and its policies to quickly changing circumstances.

I rise today with a concern that must not be kept from a debate on a subject like this. It is a message that, in a slightly disoriented society, is not always remembered. It concerns the important contributions of the family throughout Canada's history and the significance it holds today. It is particularly relevant to say this in the debate on Bill C-26 because it is a Bill which implicitly recognizes that many men and women today are members of families which are organized along traditional lines. In this circumstance, one spouse, usually the wife, is very often totally dependent upon the husband in terms of her economic well-being. I praise Bill C-26 because, in a

sense, it protects this traditional arrangement which has been the building block of every stable civilization. I do not hesitate in supporting this Bill that, while allowing people to conduct themselves as they choose, removes one of the misfortunes that can result from a commitment to the family unit.

Among the elderly women in our society, the group that is the most dependent and vulnerable surely consists of those who have committed themselves to staying in the home to raise a family. It is only because of the self-sacrifice to their families that many of these women may not have a marketable vocation with which they can support themselves. Today, through Bill C-26, we have the chance to extend some relief to the most needy of this group, those bearing the burden of widowhood. To delay this decision because other poverty-stricken individuals are not also helped is at best a case of misplaced good intentions.

I would now like to talk briefly on the subject of another matter that comes to mind in consideration of this Bill. Whenever we look at government legislation, particularly the implementation or expansion of a social program, it is natural to evaluate it from a cost benefit point of view. Hon. Members of the Liberal and NDP Parties must have some concern that due consideration be given to efficiency and effectiveness in the dispensation of government money. To expect good management and financial prudence from a Government, a charity, a business or a household is not unusual; it goes without saying. Even so, financial responsibility seems to have been forgotten in Canada for the last 20 years. We see from the mandate of the new Government that people have finally got tired of listening to political Parties which would solve all social problems by throwing money at them, while fostering dependence on the state and plunging it into debt.

Our new Government has committed itself to financial responsibility. You would think, Mr. Speaker, this would be an easy task with so much room for improvement. However, it is easier said than done when you are carrying nearly a \$200 billion debt on your back. I have to say, therefore, that it is not easy extending the spouse's allowance to some 85,000 widows and widowers. It is not easy but in this case it must be done. This is representative of our Government's firm commitment to the Canadian tradition of looking after the less fortunate. As a Government, we will never overlook the need for initiatives such as expanding the spouse's allowance plan.

As the House supports this measure, it must also recognize and support the context in which it is put forth. The Government can propose legislation like this, and in the future it will continue to do so because we are confident that the resources will be there when we really need them. This can only be a reality through responsible Government. Control over government spending does not mean spending \$35 billion more than revenues allow. Controlled spending means reducing the deficit.

I hope that everyone in this House who supports the need to expand the spouse's allowance will also support the measures the Government is taking to generate real economic growth and jobs, and to return honesty and good management to