

Spousal Allowance

Allowance Program to all widows and widowers between the ages of 60 and 64. Starting this coming September, some 85,000 people, 72,000 of them women, will be able to benefit from this measure. These 85,000 represent some 61 per cent of the total population of widows and widowers aged 60 to 64.

Essentially what we are offering to those people is the possibility of sufficient income to meet their basic needs. The Spouse's Allowance Program will guarantee them the same level of income as is currently provided to the surviving spouse of the pensioner who was in receipt of Old Age Security benefits before his death. At the moment, the maximum benefit is \$536.26 per month. This figure will, however, be raised slightly in September since benefits are indexed every three months to the cost of living.

The Government is well aware that certain groups of the needy near-elderly will still be excluded from the Spouse's Allowance Program, but unfortunately we cannot go any further at this time given the current economic situation.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, may I express my sincere wish that the evolution of women's roles within society, the improvement of their working conditions, and the review of the Canadian pension system will mean that coming generations of women will be better off.

● (1750)

[Translation]

Mrs. Claudy Mailly (Gatineau): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on that very important issue and I should like to congratulate the Hon. Member for Montreal-Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart) for his great kindness which leads him to consider that problem of our senior citizens. I should also like to say to the Hon. Member that I would be very happy if it was announced today that not only we would pay to our seniors in distress the amount now allotted to the surviving spouse but we would also grant them a pension which would bring them over the poverty level. As you know, Mr. Speaker, even with the pension now paid to senior citizens, a too great number—60 per cent of them being women—live in poverty. Those people who worked hard and paid taxes throughout their life, who have raised families, who have made Canada the great country it is today, those older citizens live in truly inhuman conditions.

Now I would merely like to indicate to the Hon. Member for Montreal-Sainte-Marie that the allowance to which he referred comes under a legislation aimed at spouses and providing them a spouses allowance. It is unfortunately impossible to use an allowance provided under a legislation meant for a certain group in our community, that is spouses in distress due to the death of the partner looking after his or her needs or merely contributing to the family income... It would be somewhat as if aged couples in distress would receive family allowances after their children have reached adulthood. What we need—

Mr. Malépart: What about the separated woman?

Mrs. Maily: Mr. Speaker, I would like to continue without being interrupted. I did not interrupt the Hon. Member when he was speaking.

Mr. Rossi: Is it an order?

Mrs. Maily: No, it is merely the wish of a member who has the same rights as you have. The Hon. Member for Bourassa (Mr. Rossi) is asking whether it is an order, Mr. Speaker, I merely ask the members opposite to let me enjoy the same rights as they have.

So, I was saying that it was necessary to find, as my colleague from the Conservative Party who spoke just before me has said, a way to rehabilitate these women in society and a small number of men as well, because more and more, we find couples where the man is the surviving spouse, and since his wife contributed a lot to the household revenue, once he reaches a certain age, he finds himself in the same situation as many women. So, I would like, as my colleague has said, this whole question of the quality of life for all senior Canadians be reviewed. Tonight, at six o'clock, I must leave to attend a dinner of the Gerontology Institute, in Hull, where the Parliamentary Secretary of the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mrs. Bertrand) is scheduled to speak on this very subject of the quality of life of senior Canadians. She will address, I am confident, other aspects, apart from ways to alleviate current problems. She will speak about the future of Canadians, of those who are now on the labour market or, even, of those who just entered the labour market because it will take at least two or three decades before the situation described by my conservative colleague can change. When it does change, a woman will not have to totally depend on a man to survive, a woman will be paid the same as a man and, when she will reach a certain age and have to retire or cannot work anymore, she will be able to enjoy a fair revenue, a revenue above the poverty level and maybe even better if we have the chance to ensure the economic renewal which will allow us to improve the living conditions of all Canadians including our elderly.

Then, for example, there is the situation of people who are forced to retire. Many of our elderly live in poverty because, during their working life, they received a pay cheque which was maybe small, but was nevertheless large enough for their needs. They reach the age of 65 without any pension, because it is only recently that people have private pensions or they simply live on only the Government pension which, naturally, is not enough to give Canadians the same quality of life they enjoyed when they were on the labour market. Thus, forced retirement creates economic problems.

On the other hand, there is also the case, naturally, of people who would like to retire at 50 or 55. There is always a debate between these two groups of Canadians, the ones who would like to continue to work and receive the same revenue and the ones who think that once one has reached a certain age