

*Old Age Security Act*

afterwards, since it becomes a vested right and the government may not throw them back into the hands of the provincial government.

Mr. Speaker, one should recognize the fact that people aged 60 to 65 have the most conservative mentality from the moral as well as social standpoint. With such a system, they will be forced to live common-law in order to qualify. A widow, for instance, will be forced to live common-law in order to qualify. That is the situation as it is.

How many women and men I know from Victoriaville, from Sainte-Croix, and throughout my constituency for that matter, who are aged 60 to 65 and who, under the New Horizons program, gather around in halls two or three times a week, have fun together, dance together, play cards together and have discussions. Now, Mr. Speaker, I can see what is going to happen. Thanks to the overwhelming generosity of this majority government, such people are going to speak to one another in terms such as the following: "Did you get your old age pension at 60? No. I'm a widow. Did you get your old age pension at 60? No. I'm single. Oh yes! But another one is getting it. Sure. But he's living common-law".

I can very well imagine, Mr. Speaker, the extraordinary reactions that we shall soon be having. I can already see the minister answering us, Mr. Speaker. In any event, I firmly intend as of now to submit such problems directly to the minister, he who knows so well how to get this Parliament to buy a pig in a poke, and I sincerely hope that he will discover that touch of magic that will enable him to have our widows, our widowers and our bachelors understand that even if they are 60 years old, they will not be entitled to the same pension as others, because they are not living common-law or because they are not married.

This minister is so broad-minded, Mr. Speaker, that he has even provided under clause 17(6) that, should one of the spouses be imprisoned—watch out, read the bill correctly—the other will lose his or her pension.

The minister has even considered this possibility. Mr. Speaker, this is the height of ridicule. If one of the spouses is imprisoned for over 90 days, for whatever reason, the other loses all his or her rights, thanks once again to the broad-mindedness and the promises of this strong, majority government.

Mr. Speaker, I am truly sorry I have to say this in the House, but I have been elected by my constituents to tell this House what they think, to repeat in this house what they want, and advise my colleagues of all parties of the problems some of them have to face in their daily lives. I am certainly not aware of all the problems which exist in all Canadian ridings, but I know that the problems my constituents of 60 to 65 must face are the same as those of your own constituents in the same age group.

Mr. Speaker, I urge you to ask all members of the House to consider seriously that we are here to legislate, that we are under no obligation to accept this bill as is and without amendment. We are here to legislate, to plead in favour of our constituents, as the minister said, regardless of party allegiance. Darn it, it is about time to prove it. Let us amend clause 1 and redefine the word "spouse" so as to allow widows, widowers and single people to become eligible to a pension when they reach 60.

[Mr. Fortin.]

If we can help other countries and finance large industries, if we can claim to live in a progressive, huge and very rich country, if we can brag about being one of the most generous of the UN countries, let us first of all give help to our own people who need it most. There are a great many unemployed in Canada between 18 and 50 who can fend for themselves and may suffer a temporary setback because of unemployment or lack of income. But they can always look for a job, they are still strong and healthy. But for people in the 60-65 age group, the outlook is bleak. They no longer have the same ability.

Mr. Speaker, we are living in an automated and industrialized society where the machine is increasingly replacing man. We have to live, and this has been repeated in the House today during the question period, with the unemployment problem; we do not know what to do with our manpower, and this is what prompts us to set up community projects like Opportunities for Youth and the Local Initiatives Program. We do not know what to do with our manpower. The government is not necessarily to blame, but rather a rapidly changing society. It is up to us to adjust.

If this is true and if we all admit the difficulties of the work force for those who are still young, how does this apply to the people from 60 to 65 years old? How can we grant so complacently such a discriminatory pension? How can we, in the Canadian Parliament, the institution in which Canadians place their hopes, pass in all conscience a bill which, on one hand, will grant an old age pension for a certain time and which, on the other hand, will stop granting this pension at the death of one of the spouses? How can we arrive at such an illogical conclusion, such a dehumanizing concept? How can we do this? What are the interests of the minister? Why is the minister refusing, why does he not give his consent? He is in power, he has the majority, he has only to decide and Parliament would have to follow. At least, Mr. Speaker, this is the situation according to the speeches made in this House.

• (1740)

At the last election, the Liberals, the Progressive Conservatives, the New Democrats, the Social Crediters, everyone was trying to please the voters and everyone was saying in his own way: We favour old age security pensions at 60 for everyone. Give us a majority and you will have this pension.

All the parties were unanimous, and this may have been the only point on which everyone agreed in the last election. Mr. Speaker, in all conscience, as duly and democratically elected legislators, we do not have the right to come back on our word today. We are committed to keep this promise. It was repeated in the Speech from the Throne, and the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker, did not say that pensions would be granted on a selective, discriminatory and inhuman basis. It said that Parliament would consider legislation granting old age pensions at 60. That is what was said. Let us stop burying our head in the sand or being dishonest.

When the hon. member for Abitibi (Mr. Laprise) for the first time in this House introduced a public bill providing for old age pensions at 60, the House thought he was not