

Social Policy

Perhaps the minister is technically and logically correct in saying that passing this motion and carrying it out would add a bit more to the situation, because then some widows would be receiving allowances and other widows would not. The minister has indicated that this motion adds to the inequities. One of the reasons I support this motion is that once that happens, it cannot stop there. The government will have to go on and give this allowance to everyone.

Also I say there is a certain practical and humanitarian approach to this. It is bad enough that the government does not give the allowance to a widow who is between 60 and 65, to the spinster, nor to the older single sister who looked after members of her family. It is bad enough that the government does not give the allowance to those people. But to give it to some women between the ages of 60 and 65 who draw the benefits for a month or two or a year or two, and then to take it away, is worse. The government sends a sympathy letter which indicates, "Too bad you lost your husband/wife, but, as you know, this is what the law says".

The minister indicated that this was put forward in the context of a guaranteed annual income. I do not remember the former minister of national health and welfare making very much of that point when he introduced the legislation. That this was the beginning of a guaranteed annual income was a secret on the government side. But the minister was quite correct when she said that it was a means of solving one particular problem, namely, the problem a couple faces when trying to live on one pension. That line has been given to us repeatedly. The minister was quite correct in quoting it again today. The former minister, the present Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Regulations (Mr. Lalonde), indicated that the government was attempting to solve that one problem. I suppose it is logical to say that the government hoped to go on from that point to solve other problems, but this poor government has only an overwhelming majority and could not go any further in this 1974 to 1978 parliament!

We have said it 40 times, and we will say it another 40 times: if two people cannot be expected to live on one pension, how in the world can one person be expected to live on no pension? That is what the government is allowing to happen. It is saying to every single woman, divorced woman and widowed woman between the ages of 60 and 65 that there is nothing for them. Of course, we get the line that those people can go on social assistance or welfare programs which are just as much a right as the assistance under this program; but the fact of the matter is that the Old Age Security Act has been accepted as a basic program which carries with it pride. People are proud to be drawing pensions under the Old Age Security Act. To say to people, "No, you cannot receive benefit under this act; you must go to welfare", is degrading. That is why I feel the spouse's allowance as set up is basically wrong.

● (1632)

I well remember being at home watching the national news on television one night during the 1974 election campaign and hearing the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) announce that they

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

were going to introduce the spouse's allowance. I remember saying to the television screen right then, "Does he not realize the problems that will be created?", and hearing him come back and state, almost as though we were in conversation, "This will create other problems, but we shall have to solve them later". When will the government solve them, Mr. Speaker? The Liberal party promised pensions, unemployment insurance and health insurance in 1919. It took until 1926 to get the first old age pension, until 1940 to get unemployment insurance, and until the late 1950s to get health insurance. When are we going to solve these problems?

I see that you have been handed a note telling you that my time is running out, Mr. Speaker. Before it does, may I say that although I recognize that the implementation of this motion would create further problems, I would be glad to see this done. It would solve problems for a few widows, but it would hasten the day when the government would have to provide pensions for all between ages 60 and 65 who are out of the labour market.

What is proposed in the motion of the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) should be implemented forthwith. Therefore, I move, seconded by the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow):

That the motion be amended by changing the period at the end thereof to a comma, and by adding immediately thereafter the following words:

"and this House calls on the government to terminate this practice forthwith."

[*Translation*]

Mr. Eudore Allard (Rimouski): Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to thank the mover of the motion. I am also pleased to take part in the debate on the motion of the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald).

As stated so aptly in the motion, I also think it is unjust to terminate the allowance of the spouse aged 60 to 65 after the death of the pensioner. I would like to recall that in March 1977, I moved a motion under the provisions of Standing Order 43 urging the government to pay at least two thirds of the allowance to the spouse aged 60 to 65 who loses his or her pensioned marriage partner. A great many people between 60 and 65 are faced with serious problems of survival, particularly pensioners' widows since the majority of those aged 60 or over are women.

The economic situation of elderly citizens is precarious since many of them who receive only transfer income from the government are seriously affected by inflation. Indeed, living at the limit or even below the poverty line, the greater part of their budget is spent on food and housing, two areas where price increases are staggering. In this situation pensioners with no investment or work income have no protection other than the quarterly indexing of their pensions.

To make this old age security system more equitable and in line with today's economic situation I suggested various improvements in the past. Indeed, our old age security system has many gaps which the government has failed to bridge so