

*Old Age Security Act*

about in homes for senior citizens, at senior citizens' clubs and meetings of the AQDR? What is being discussed around the bridge table? One woman says to her friend: You are lucky to be a widow because on September 1, you are going to get an allowance. Why is the Government doing this? My income is less than yours, and just because I am single, I will not get the allowance. The elderly do not understand. They do not consider that their marital status should make a difference. To us, this measure is extremely discriminatory because it only helps half of the people who should benefit from it. Even the Government Members who support this Bill agree this is true. The Hon. Member for Duvernay (Mr. Della Noce) who spoke earlier said in reply to a question by one of our Members: It is a good Bill but it is not enough. It certainly is not enough if we are going to neglect part of the population in favour of another.

For instance, why are so many elderly women in this country living below the poverty level, in utter poverty? Because in most cases, these people on low incomes depend on welfare. Hon. Members are aware that welfare benefits provide less money than old age security benefits or the spouse's allowance. This means that all senior citizens between sixty and sixty-five who are not receiving allowances and are living on welfare are looking forward to the day they turn sixty-five, when they will be eligible for a federal pension.

What about the philosophy of the Progressive Conservative Party which the Prime Minister has expounded so many times in this House and which, if we are to go by his words, is to help those who are in the greatest need? Can we identify in our society people who are in greater need than those people on low incomes, between the ages of sixty and sixty-five, most of whom are women? If the Government is serious when the Prime Minister says that his priority is to help those who are most in need, the Government would extend these allowances to cover, without exception, Canadians who are single, separated or divorced, as well as those who are widowed. On the Government side they will say it is a matter of money. Of course, the whole Cabinet and the whole Conservative Party have been mesmerized by the sharp knife being wielded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) in an orgy of cutbacks.

The Hon. Member for Duvernay said that it would already cost \$190 million to make the allowance available to widows and widowers. Clearly, the question we are entitled to ask is this: If we want to include those who are single, separated, divorced and so on, where are we going to find the money? Well, Mr. Speaker, I can suggest one way of finding the money that is fast and fair in my view.

When the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) recently introduced his white paper adorned with a blue cover, to redistribute the money that goes into family allowances, child tax credits and exemptions, he started with a fiscal attack on middle-income citizens, withdrawing the equivalent of \$571 million in benefits and redistributing only \$161 million

to the people most in need, to the families in need. The Opposition criticized this action saying that it was giving a meagre 48 cents a day to those really in need. Something must be kept in mind however, namely that out of the \$571 million which the Minister will be taking from the pockets of Canadians, of average workers, only \$161 million will go to the neediest. Where then is the balance going? Well, the federal Government is saving \$80 million and the Provinces are getting \$330 million.

Those \$410 million are more than enough to extend benefits to those people who are single, separated or divorced. Why give \$330 million to the Provinces, which are mostly run by the Conservative Party? In my view, a much better use would be made of that money if it were directed to senior citizens who are now subjected to crass discrimination by Bill C-26. So let not the Progressive Conservative Party pretend they do not have the money needed to extend the allowance to people who are not currently covered by the legislation.

In fact, since the Minister is about to launch his \$571 million fiscal attack on middle-income workers, he should redistribute the benefits he will reap to those who need them, including our senior citizens, rather than funnel most of the funds to his Conservative friends in the provincial governments.

● (1600)

Mr. Speaker, eventually we will be referring Bill C-26 to committee. We will do so because we want associations representing senior citizens, such as the AQDR, to be able to appear before the committee and explain to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) how discriminatory his legislation is because it only gives benefits to half of the people who deserve them.

We are certainly not impressed by the threats and claims being made by the Government House Leader who says that we are trying to delay the implementation of this measure. In any case, the Government does not expect the cheques to reach senior citizens before September 1. In fact, we think that is far too late, and we will certainly have finished talking about the subject well before September 1.

As soon as we manage to make Hon. Members on the other side of the House understand that half of the people who should benefit from this measure will not, one of the first questions I would ask is: Why wait until September? This measure could be made effective at an earlier date.

We want the Bill to go to committee because we intend to propose changes. However, considering the changes we wish to see, namely that single, separated or divorced Canadians will also be eligible for the allowance, it will be difficult to propose amendments of this kind, in committee, to Bill C-26 as it is now, with a royal recommendation that only covers those who are widowed. We will not be able to propose an amendment to