

**Mr. Hudon:** They are parliamentary. Therefore, as of September 1985, almost 85,000 widows and widowers, whom I, unfortunately cannot name, will receive, should Bill C-26 pass, a minimum income which will help them face standard costs of living. This guaranteed income will be equal to what is received by the 6,300 beneficiaries of spouse's allowance.

**Mr. Malépart:** Do you know why a 60 year old person does not receive the same amount as a 65 year old?

**An Hon. Member:** Are we in question period?

**Mrs. Mailly:** You already spoke!

**Mr. Hudon:** The Government recognizes that many people between the age of 60 and 64, who are single, separated, divorced or married will continue to be deprived of spouse's allowance. We also acknowledge that if our resources were not so limited, we could be talking about very different issues. If the Government had not inherited such a deficit, if we had a balanced budget, and if our economy was going as well as we could expect, as well as Canadians would like, we might be able to introduce the kind of social benefits the Hon. Member is talking about, and even go beyond our electoral promises.

In the meantime, he is free to criticize the Minister of Health and Welfare and the Government who make genuine and responsible efforts to help the needy. However, I can guarantee him that his criticism will not prevent the Government from doing whatever is possible, when it is feasible.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the financial realities we face and our sense of responsibilities totally prevent us from improving further the spouse's allowance program. It is sad, but we should not, nevertheless, underestimate the importance of this benefit, which will start being paid to 85,000 more widows and widowers in September.

We can now see, Mr. Speaker, how legislation develops, how it changes, year after year. Parliamentarians can, when the time and the situation allow it, make the necessary changes, horizontally or vertically, but I repeat, the Government priority at the present time was to help the widows and widowers in their early sixties because, according to a parliamentary group, they were the most in need.

● (1740)

[English]

**Mr. Moe Mantha (Nipissing):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on the motion presented by the Liberal Member for Montreal-Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart) concerning Bill C-26. The purpose of this Bill is to extend the Spouse's Allowance Program to all widows and widowers between the ages of 60 and 64, regardless of the age of their spouse at the time of death.

### *Spousal Allowance*

This, Mr. Speaker, is a very significant step in the battle against poverty since this age group is particularly affected. Women in this age group are rarely poor as a result of misfortune or other foreseeable events. For the majority, their poverty is the consequence of the role society has assigned to them, their difficulty in gaining access to the job market, the conditions they have had to work under if they did work, and the poor protection they have had under the Canadian pension system.

Society has assigned the responsibility for rearing children and doing unpaid domestic work to women and the responsibility for meeting families' economic needs to men. People of my generation will remember the social disapproval there was in the past of any married woman, but particularly those with children, who wanted to get a paid job. Most working wives then were forced on to the labour market by the difficulty of their family's economic situation. Since the role society has reserved for women went hand in hand with financial dependency, it is not surprising that they are without resources when their husbands die.

The low level of participation in the labour market by older women also contributes to their poverty. According to Statistics Canada figures, only 26.2 per cent of women between the ages of 60 and 64 were in the workforce in 1984. Women of all ages made up 53.5 per cent of the workforce at that time.

This low figure may be explained by the many obstacles older women face when they try to get into, or go back into, the workforce after spending a large portion of their lives at home. First, there is the problem of training. What they have learned is often either obsolete or inadequate for the increasingly specialized needs of today. There are training and refresher courses available to prepare them for entry into the job market, but those cannot keep up with the demand. Older women must also face certain prejudices when it comes to candidate selection. A number of employers prefer to hire younger people over those who will be taking retirement in a few years. It is a well known fact that employability decreases as a person gets older.

Access to paid employment does not necessarily mean that women will be protected against poverty. Some who do work do so under the most unenviable conditions. They are still concentrated in a limited number of often poorly paid jobs with the least advantageous working conditions.

The protection offered to surviving spouses under the Canadian pension system is another cause of the difficult economic situation a large number of widows aged 60 to 64 find themselves in. I would remind you that in the Throne Speech the Government announced its intent to engage in discussions with the provinces on a total review of the Canadian pension system. Survivor benefits will be among the points discussed.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, those aged 60 to 64 deserve a better fate than the one in store for them at the present time. It is the duty of the Government to come to their assistance, regardless of the current economic situation. We are assuming that responsibility by proposing an extension of the Spouse's