

Adjournment Debate

what happened in the Budget—the Minister of Social Injustice in Canada, Mr. Speaker, I asked the Minister at that time why this Progressive Conservative Government has deliberately decided to debar 80,000 older persons in need, aged 60 to 65 years, from the spouse allowance program for the simple reason that they were single, separated or divorced.

● (1820)

Mr. Speaker, my colleague also reminds me that all persons in religious orders, unless the Minister considers that having been married to God they have become widows or widowers, those persons as matters now stand will not be entitled to the spouse allowance because they are considered single.

Mr. Speaker, I would like the Parliamentary Secretary to tell me how it is possible that in 1985, men and women can meet in Cabinet and look at the number of needy citizens who now live, not below the poverty line but below the misery line since they are on welfare, how can human beings in 1985 decide to give assistance to half of those persons while ignoring the other half? Who are the persons being penalized by the Bill? Let us look together at the single people who are 60 years old today. Why? First, those people often have been living mainly in rural areas. Most often, they were the eldest daughters in the family, people who sacrificed their own future. They left school early enough to help their mother raise the children at home. They sacrificed their own interests so their brothers and sisters could get an education, find jobs. And upon reaching a certain age, they had to go on sacrificing their own aspirations to stay with their fathers and mothers, because of their age, rather than sending father and mother to a nursing home. They accepted to give up everything to stay at home, they remained single, saving the governments retiring home money. And all those people inherited from their parents has been the so-called family home. Now they own the house where they have been living but they have no money to pay for their property taxes.

Mr. Speaker, because this Government and this Minister of Social Injustice refuse to help those persons, it is a sad sight, Mr. Speaker, to see those people who sacrificed everything all their lives, who served the community being told by the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and the Minister: No, you are not to be entitled to the spouse's allowance.

What about the 80,000 persons who are separated or divorced? I remember the celebrations on Remembrance Day. We mentioned veterans, widows and widowers. I think that persons older than I would remember the many broken marriages at that time because of people having to live far apart.

● (1825)

They are mothers who kept going despite the husband being away for whatever reason, Mothers who all by themselves raised five or ten children, who sacrificed everything when times were really tough, not in the easier years we ourselves

have known. And, today, the Government is telling them: Because you are separated, unfortunately you are not entitled to the spouse's allowance. It is only for widows and widowers. When I am told we are looking at this in terms of money, it seems to me we all have been elected here not only for the purpose of writing a budget. We were elected with our hearts and our souls, with the knowledge we have. I am convinced that if there was a free vote on that matter, Mr. Speaker, there is not one. Member who would vote against extending the spouse's allowance to all persons living alone, whether single, separated or divorced.

Mr. Speaker, it is unthinkable that those 80,000 persons will be turned down come September. They are to be found in each and every constituency. I believe that I have been trying to call the Government's attention on that since before the Christmas holidays. I have been calm, I have been violent, I have been tough to try and make this Government understand. I may have upset a few people and I am sorry about that but I am quite sincere when I say that when someone is in dire straits, when someone is not treated fairly, I think it is our duty as Members to raise the issue and get someone's attention.

I do not want to score political points, but look at all the waste; they say there is no money, they want to reduce the deficit, but they have to live up to our NATO commitments and so they will send a thousand more soldiers to Lahr, at a cost of \$100 million a year. I wish the Prime Minister had been more humane, that the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) had also been more humane. The former Minister of National Health and Welfare, Miss Bégin, would never have done anything like that. It seems to me they should have said: Let us respect our commitments towards Canadians first and then, after three or four years, we will respect our NATO commitments. To my mind, Mr. Speaker, the first thing to do would have been to meet the needs of senior citizens. I will not even comment on the penalties imposed in the recent Budget.

But I keep hoping and I have confidence in the Parliamentary Secretary. I am seriously considering the possibility of urging the Prime Minister to ask for the resignation of the Minister of National Health and Welfare and to put the Parliamentary Secretary in his place. I hope she will answer me from the bottom of her heart, as she did before, rather than read from a paper written by departmental officials.

Mrs. Gabrielle Bertrand (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Tonight I am not going to use the notes provided by the Department, Mr. Speaker, because answering the Hon. Member for Montreal-Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart) is too easy.

He wants to champion the cause of the poorest of the poor within our society, something for which I congratulate him. This does not mean, however, that we on this side remain insensitive to the needs of these people. As you said a while