

Spousal Allowance

However it is important to realize that this program was an improvement for 37 per cent of those people. Obviously, it would have been better if the rest of them, or 63 per cent had not been excluded, but the previous government had recognized the importance of helping as many people as it could help and this is precisely what it had done.

● (1730)

Fortunately, the Old Age Security Act was implemented in 1952 as a result of which a universal pension was paid to people 70 years old and over provided they met residency requirements. It was a significant improvement. The Old Age Security Program was going to be improved many times over the years: for instance, as my hon. colleague has just mentioned, the Guaranteed Income Supplement, an allowance based on a means test, was introduced in 1967 and the Spouse's Allowance, in 1975.

Mr. Speaker, I realize that I spent more than a few minutes on the history of Old Age Security. In fact, the development of the program is similar to that of the Spouse's Allowance. A program that, initially, was far from being perfect was extended and made more generous over the years, as succeeding governments considered they could spend additional resources on it.

What we must ask ourselves is this: Should we stop trying to improve the Old Age Security Program until we can afford to make it perfect? Must the Government refrain from helping those it can help on the pretence that it cannot for the time being improve the lot of other needy persons? Certainly not! We must continue to seek steady financial and social improvements whenever and however we can. And in this respect, Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my hon. colleague that the pension reform as proposed by the Hon. Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) is in line with the commitments we made during the last election. We are indeed too often blamed for not keeping our word.

And I also remember how vigorously at times that promise has been said to be ridiculous, that it did not make sense and yet, today there are people who say that not only does it make sense but that it should be extended. Like I said, in taking this step now we are moving in accordance with our promises and our means.

Another point was also important in terms of universality: Pensionable age could be lowered from 65—my hon. colleague knows that, it was also part of their political commitment—from 65 to 64 years of age. That is considered universal. That is a horizontal category. I know that possibility was scoffed at recently but we had to choose either a horizontal group or a vertical one among the neediest.

Mr. Malépart: You stopped half way.

Mr. Hudon: I beg your pardon?

Mr. Malépart: You only went halfway.

Mr. Hudon: So, extending the Spouse's Allowance Program to all low-income people between 60 and 64, without taking into account their marital status, would cost an estimated \$1.5 billion in the first year. I say again that would cost \$1.5 billion for the first year.

Mr. Malépart: Mr. Speaker, that is not true.

Mr. Hudon: Had you spoken longer, you could have disproved that figure.

Mr. Rossi: That gives you no right to use inaccurate figures.

Mr. Hudon: In view of the economic situation, we cannot afford new expenses of that magnitude. The government was in a position to . . . Therefore, Mr. Speaker, there were the two following options. First, not to change the Spouse's Allowance Program, under which only spouses and widowers or widows of recipients of the Guaranteed Income Supplement were eligible. This was the first option.

Or, following the recommendation made in 1983 by the Parliamentary Task Force on Pension Reform, which had an all-party representation, we could extend the Spouse's Allowance Program to all low-income widows and widowers between 60 and 64 years of age, thus recognizing that they form a priority group which needs more assistance.

Nevertheless, this resolution was made by the parliamentary task force in 1983 and we followed up in 1985 to an important part thereof. In doing that, we also recognized the efforts and work done by the members of the parliamentary task force.

Fortunately, we know that the only way to reach one's goal is sometimes to go step by step. This is why the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp), on January 25, has tabled Bill C-26, an Act to amend the Old Age Security Act. We do not claim that this Bill is perfect. It is not! Nevertheless, we should not excuse ourselves for providing as much help as we can to those who most need it.

As of September 1985—

Mr. Malépart: The uniforms would have been better used on older people?

Mr. Hudon: Anyway, I will say to my hon. colleague that people in the Armed Forces need a pair of pants, and whatever colour we may have chosen, we still bought them because you would have waged a real war in the House if they had walked about bare bottomed, I guess.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Hudon: I don't know whether these terms are unparliamentary, Mr. Speaker?

An Hon. Member: They are parliamentary.