

Old Age Security Act

Mr. Fortin: It was stated, Mr. Speaker, throughout my constituency by the Liberal candidate, the present special assistant to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand).

Mr. Speaker, the minister said in his speech of June 6, and again I quote:

This—

This bill—

—will ensure that payments go to those who most need them, and are not granted on a universal basis.

So, Mr. Speaker, now the cat is out of the bag. What does the bill say? Let's sum it up. Before we go over the bill, let's remember. That I am saying again and can prove any time beyond any possible doubt, it has been promised over and over again across the Eastern Townships constituencies that if the Liberals were elected, if they formed a majority government they would enact the old age pension during the very first session, and a universal pension at that. We have heard it mentioned in speeches, we saw it on television, we read it on pamphlets delivered from door to door. You may ask any one in my riding they all will say they have seen it advertised.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if we go over the bill, we read this in clause 1, under the definition of "spouse"—it is easy to revel in words. Let's try to understand what the minister intends to do after making the promise, during his electoral campaign that he would grant the old age pension at 60, after giving people that hope: this is what he says about a pensioner's spouse in clause 1. I quote from the bill:

"spouse" in relation to a pensioner includes a person of the opposite sex who has lived with the pensioner for three or more years where there is a bar to their marriage or at least one year where there is no such bar and the pensioner and that person have publicly represented themselves as man and wife;

● (1720)

Clause 1, that is the cornerstone of this bill, means that when a spouse or a single person, a widow or a widower aged 60 to 65 decides to live with a person over 65 like man and wife during at least one year with promise of marriage later, if they have publicly represented themselves as man and wife or if they can marry later, that is when there is no more bar because of a previous marriage, or if they live together for three years as man and wife when there is a bar to their marriage due to the non-dissolution of the former marriage of one of the spouses, because that person between 60 and 64 is living as man and wife with a person over 65, he or she will be admissible to the Old Age Security at 60, as says the Minister. In doing so, Mr. Speaker, we legalize such an irregular matrimonial situation, that is living as man and wife for a person 60 to 65.

Then, this is the first of the generous gifts from this government which was elected on its promises of universality.

Second, a widower, a widow or a single person is not entitled to Old age security at 60 under this Liberal government. This is what is provided in Clause 1 of this bill. The person must be married or living with another person as man and wife and if single, or if the spouse dies, he or she is completely ignored by the Liberal government and loses all rights to pension. The Minister said it very eloquently, they just have to take advantage of the generous Social Welfare programs to which this government, liberal

[Mr. Fortin.]

of course, contributes 50 per cent. And yet, the Minister is a Quebecer, and if he has a little bit of honesty, he will recognize that in Quebec, social welfare is subject to patronage and intrigue and that the pensioners are the victims of obvious injustices after endless inquiries invading their privacy to such a point that those people live on a public pittance as if they were granted a favour.

We just have to work in our office every day in our constituencies, on Mondays, Tuesdays, Saturdays and Sundays, to open our door and our ears, to see and hear welfare recipients come in and tell us: We cannot make ends meet with \$120 a month, with \$97 a month. Every time there is a 50 cent- or one-dollar rent hike, they have to report for readjustment. Then payments are suspended, and they sometimes have to wait up to two months to get their cheques.

The minister stated yesterday to the committee that in such cases welfare benefits can be paid quite promptly. Maybe he was talking of the other provinces' experience, but he was surely not referring to the situation in Quebec.

I could mention hundreds of cases where people apply for welfare because they are no longer entitled to unemployment insurance or they are disabled and cannot work. They do not receive their first cheque before the end of the second month. This I can substantiate with names, social security numbers and addresses of people that have to deal with the Quebec government red tape. The minister, however, stated that this bill will help them and that in cases where they are not eligible, they only need contact social welfare, financed half way by the federal government, in order to get prompt service.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot have any partisan feeling when talking about people who come to my office and tell me the same thing every Monday, every Saturday. Last Saturday still, in Sainte-Croix, I was doing office work. Forty-eight persons came to see me, 13 of which were welfare cases. Each of those 13 persons was waiting for the first cheque and was requesting immediate help. That is the situation in Quebec. I will even go further and ask the minister to hear our views. In cases where a married or unmarried couple qualifies, especially those persons between 60 and 65 who can hope to get the old age security pension because of their spouses, in cases where the spouse over 65 dies, I feel in the name of my colleagues and all those people that a right has been acquired—

I feel that by then the spouse between 60 and 65 does not have to lose the old age pension just because his or her spouse who was 65 died. I say by then that had become a vested right. A situation of fact had been recognized because she had lived in a common law, religious or civil marriage with a person over 65. That under the legislation now before us had qualified her on all counts of age, place of residence and matrimonial status to receive the said allowance for pensions at 60.

I say it is inhumane, discriminatory, and unfair to take away the pension given to the one who was between 60 and 65 because of the death of the spouse. Let us suppose such a case occurs after the person received the pension for four or five months, or a year, before that bounty from this government. By then, Mr. Speaker, that family was used to living on a certain income, it was used to planning its budget according to the income provided under this