

Old Age Security Act

In order to improve the financial position of all Canadians 65 or over, this government has granted a substantial tax reduction for the year 1972. This applies instead of the additional tax exemption of about \$650 granted to people having reached 70 years of age by the previous plan. Then, on reaching 65, people were entitled to a reduction of \$1,000, which means that a single person 65 years old or over was entitled to the basic exemption of \$1,500, plus an exemption of \$100 for charitable donations, plus another \$1,000, which altogether represented a \$2,600 exemption for the year 1972, whereas the exemption for 1973 will amount to \$2,700, plus a supplementary 5 per cent exemption its minimum being \$100 and its maximum \$500.

In the case of the couple 65 years old or over, similar reductions have been granted by this government.

In 1972, the total exemption could vary from \$4,950 to \$5,200 whereas, in 1973, with the adoption of the last budget introduced in the House by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner), the tax exemptions will still increase.

According to the comments I have received from my fellow citizens in reply to questionnaires, many of them wish the old age pensions were granted to people 60 years old or over. In their views, this would be a practical way of creating jobs and allowing young people to find work more easily.

I think that this recommendation deserves to be thoroughly discussed right now, because in a few years, most workers will be entitled to the maximum under the Canada Pension Plan or the Quebec Pension Plan. Indeed, the cost of the guaranteed income supplement will be decreasing, and I hope that those additional funds will be used to gradually lower the age of retirement, as it was done in 1966.

Yesterday afternoon, the minister said, and he gave some figures, that it was now difficult to look after citizens aged between 60 and 64. As so many others, government members would have preferred to see the situation or the lot of those people improved and since the minister and his provincial counterparts will meet in April to deal with that problem, we hope that a solution will be found in the very near future.

Other valuable suggestions have also been made. It has been suggested that the pensioner's wife, aged 60, should also get the pension and the guaranteed income supplement in some cases. If the legislation allowed the wife to receive the pension, that would be unfair to a widow or a single person who is 60 years old. I would agree if in the future all women of 60 or over could get the pension when they reach 60.

In my opinion, women at that age are facing difficulties greater than those which men may be up against. Even today many European countries already allow 65-year-old men and 60-year-old women to receive a pension. That is an approach which we could surely suggest here, and I agree with other hon. members that we should get on with it as quickly as possible, perhaps on the basis of the same principle used last year to phase down the eligibility age for pension. We should start to deal forthwith with that problem now confronting us.

As long as we will not lower to 60 the eligibility age for pension to all persons, there will be reasons and obligations to keep on paying assistance benefits with the cooperation of the provinces on the basis of equal contributions. Each citizen has a right to assistance if his situation does not allow him to receive a sufficient income, and if my information is correct, the province of Ontario allocates to the spouse of a pensioner in receipt of the guaranteed income supplement an additional sum so that the couple receives at least \$235 a month.

I wish the province of Quebec and all the other Canadian provinces could prove as generous in the future, because that assistance is also paid by the federal government on the basis of contributions.

One Canadian province already uses federal funds to help those who need it most; in British Columbia, old age pension and a guaranteed income supplement amount to \$200 a month, and only half of those \$30 is coming out of the provincial coffers.

Senior citizens also have a right to an active contribution to the community, and today 709,000 men between ages 55 and 64 have a job and 270,000 women of the same age group are also part of the labour force throughout this country.

It is acknowledged and accepted that compulsory retirement can destroy whatever has been and is important to the person who is forced to retire. That means that the establishment of a fixed age for retirement should be avoided and that the eligibility for jobs should be made easy until such time as a person wishes to retire or has to do so on grounds of illness. However, perhaps we should help the elderly person to withdraw gradually from regular employment, redefine the social role of a pensioner and encourage the greatest possible number of retired people to participate in community life.

Such ideas are not at all conflicting with the principle of the guaranteed annual income for people ranging from 60 to 64 years of age, but they suggest programs which would add to the financial assistance so as to give retired people the opportunity to put their idle knowledge and experience at the service of others. A fine example of this is the New Horizons program.

In conclusion, and subject to budgetary considerations, the federal government should first consider introducing a guaranteed annual income for people 60 to 64 years old. For the first year, if necessary, the pension should be granted to the 64-year olds, the age being reduced each year until the entire group is included. Then, the guaranteed annual income could very well be a little less than the old age pension and the guaranteed income supplement combined. Finally, the program should at least provide an income equal to the guaranteed income supplement.

Moreover, some tax legislation should be brought in jointly with the provinces to encourage the gradual transition from full employment to retirement, by putting at the individual's disposal means to engage in useful and creative occupations and to remove or reduce the age limit specified in the pension plans.

In co-operation with the provinces, programs should be developed to create part-time jobs, which would stimulate the participation in community life.