

PENSIONS FOR THE BLIND

—A National Necessity

THE condition of the blind today is worse than it ever has been. Due to the prevailing conditions their sighted relations and friends are not able to help them as they have done in the past. A few years ago hundreds of blind persons earned their living teaching music, playing at dances, tuning pianos, etc., but the radio has taken these occupations away.

Australia and New Zealand give pensions to the blind at the age of sixteen. Great Britain, with her heavy taxation and burdens, besides giving the blind population a pension, supplements the earnings of the blind. Ireland, Russia and Japan, and most of the States in America, grant pensions to the sightless. Canada takes better care of its criminals than it does of the poor blind. The criminal is given board, lodging and clothing; but thousands of the blind are left to starve or beg.

The first National Conference of the Blind of Canada was held in the buildings of the Montreal Association for the Blind in June, 1926, when delegates from the Atlantic to the Pacific were present. Mr. P. E. Layton, who arranged the Convention, was appointed Chairman. He urged the vital necessity of Pensions for the Blind, and strongly advocated the establishment of a National Organization of the Blind to further this movement. As a result of the Conference the Canadian Federation of the Blind was founded, and now has branches in nearly every large city of the Dominion. A delegation of fifty blind persons from the Conference, which number was augmented by sightless persons on arriving in Ottawa, marched to the Parliament Buildings and were received by the Prime Minister, Hon. Mackenzie King, to whom Mr. P. E. Layton and several delegates made a strong appeal for pensions. Nearly every year since, petitions have been presented to the Federal and Provincial Governments.

Last year a United Memorial, representing every organization for the Blind in Canada, was presented to the Federal Government, and a copy was sent to every Provincial Legislature. A copy of this Memorial is reproduced on the opposite page.

The only result achieved through this presentation, aside from attracting public attention, was that the matter was discussed at the last conference in Ottawa of Provincial Premiers. Due to the opposition of one Province no action was taken.

It is high time that the people and government of Canada shouldered their responsibilities towards this unfortunate class of citizens. Legislation should be enacted for their comfort and well being, and thus remove them from the necessity of being dependent on charity.