

This is why we rejoice that, in his budget speech of December 2, the minister anticipates an increase in old age pensions. However, I should like to make some remarks as well as some proper representations.

The minister brings no change to the provision setting at age 65 the eligibility for this pension. As far as I am concerned, and through the force of circumstances, eligibility for old age pension has been reached well before 65, because very often, 50-, 55- or 60-year-old people cannot find employment anymore, nor can they undergo retraining. In fact, they are like derelicts in society and they cannot draw any social security payment.

The 55- or 60-year old who is ill or unemployed, even if he has managed to make the final payment on a little home and accumulate a few savings, is in a precarious position as he is not covered by any federal government program.

And if he applies for old age security pension, the answer will be: "Wait till you are 65." All that is left is to apply for welfare benefits. Then he will be told: "Begin by spending your savings and when they are exhausted you can come to us."

This is the type of reasoning used day in and day out by provincial civil servants in charge of welfare benefits. "When you are at the end of your rope, then we may perhaps help you." And my hon. colleagues are aware of the situation.

Should this 55- or 60-year-old person, who is not eligible either for the old age security pension or for social security benefits, apply to the Manpower Centre for a job or, being uneducated, should he ask to receive some training which would enable him to make a living, he will be told: Your chances of obtaining a job when you have completed the course are very dim. At any rate, should we allow you to hold a job, we would feel that we were giving you a bare minimum of social security and you would be taking the place of younger people. So, it is impossible for us to help you.

So, what is to be done with such a person? My colleagues of all parties will grant me that no government program takes into account the group of people whose ages range from 50 to 65.

• (4:10 p.m.)

When citizens reach the age of 65, the federal government begins to take care of them, but at 50, most of the time, the provincial government does not provide for them any longer because these persons have put a little money aside. Very often, they fall ill and have to be hospitalized. The medical expenses incurred then pile up and they find themselves in dire straits.

You will tell me that there is medicare but the fact is that I know scores of persons in my riding who have spent today whatever money they had put aside because there was no government program to help them.

Therefore, I want to tell the Minister of National Health and Welfare that the minimum age which he sets

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at 65 is too high and that it should be brought down to 60. Any person of 60 should receive the old age security pension, because at that age, 90 per cent of the people are jobless, or without any income to live on and discharge their family responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, I feel this is an important point and I deeply regret that in this review in depth of the income security programs in Canada, the eligible age has not been reduced to 60.

I want to make this appeal to the minister and tell him that Canadians between 50 and 65 years of age, when they hold no job and do not get any income say to themselves: If I can only live long enough to get my old age pension. It is almost ridiculous:

I am in the office I maintain in my riding every week end, as many of my colleagues do, and out of 20 persons who come to see me, I would say quite frankly—and I could prove it—that 12 of them are in that situation.

These are unemployed people who cannot follow a refresher course, cannot receive welfare payments because they have small savings of \$400 or \$500 and who are waiting for their old age security pension.

It is sad to see that the white paper does not deal with the problems of people caught between two age groups: the age when one can work and the age when one receives the old age security pension.

I most sincerely hope the minister will consider this proposal and I am sure that if he calls for the support of all hon. members he will get it. In this respect, I hope the committee to which the bill will be referred will give the matter very serious consideration.

I would like to insist on another point. It is a matter of principle.

It seems to me that when the government grants an old age pension to one of the spouses it should be understood that the other spouse will automatically get the same pension. For instance when a senior citizen of 65 gets his old age security pension his wife should get it automatically too.

I think that we should not make distinctions in that matter. In his speech of December 2, the Minister of National Health and Welfare has clearly stated that the provisions of this bill are inadequate. His argumentation is very weak. When one examines it carefully, one sees that the government has simply brushed aside that proposal.

In my opinion, it seems logical for the government to consider most seriously my second proposal to the effect that in all cases, whenever one spouse gets its old age security pension, the other one should get it also, automatically, and without any investigation.

The third point which I would like to raise before this House—and this may be the most significant—is the following: from now on the government will hand out to