

*Old Age Security Act*

of getting employment and being rehabilitated in the industrial world are not good. All he has to look forward to is his pension.

In addition to the rather sad letters I get from persons over 65 who are not getting enough pension, I get a great many letters from people who are between 60 and 65 who have nothing to fall back on and who can only wait until they are 65 and collect the old age pension. The situation of such people is tragic. I say to the Minister of National Health and Welfare that it behooves him to put right on top of his list of concerns this problem, because he must do something for persons between 60 and 65. I say, all power to him in anything he can do for groups below that age, but please do not ignore the possibility of doing something for those between 60 and 65 simply because something has to be done for those below the age of 60 as well.

As I said, I welcome the fact that these conferences are planned, particularly the April conference. I think the idea of taking a new look at our entire income maintenance, welfare and social security program is good. However, the trouble with these over-all reviews is that they come up with grandiose schemes that are difficult to put into effect so that for a long time nothing is done. I therefore plead again with the minister to give the strong lead in the cabinet that I know he can give for action to be taken on some of the pieces of legislation that are on our statute books right now. For example, I urge that he push very hard for acceptance of amendments to the Canada Pension Plan. I know he told us he had some trouble with the provinces when they met here a short while ago. However, it still makes no sense for the old age security pension and the guaranteed income supplement to be escalated each year by the actual increase in the cost of living, but for the pension escalation paid under the Canada Pension Plan to be limited to a 2 per cent ceiling. For the provinces to say they do not want to agree to the removal of that because they want to be able to borrow the money that is in the fund is a downright shame. If necessary, they should be told this in every provincial legislature in this country. I think the Minister of National Health and Welfare should use the bargaining power he has to ensure that that ceiling is taken off the escalation in the Canada Pension Plan so that those pensions will grow year by year at least by the actual amount of the rise in the cost of living.

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I mention again, as I have on other occasions, the Disabled Persons Act and the Blind Persons Act. I realize that the persons who come under these pieces of legislation get something more than is in those acts by virtue of the Canada Assistance Plan, but it is still very galling to those people to face the fact that although for a number of years their maximum pension increased in line with increases in old age security, that has not happened for a number of years. In the case of the blind, in particular, there should be a universal means test-free allowance. Surely that is the least a society like ours can do for the blind. In the case of the disabled, who are tossed back and forth between the Disabled Persons Act and the social welfare legislation of the various provinces, that is not good enough. The minister may tell me this will be dealt

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with in the total review, but the totality of that review can get so large that for a long time nothing will be done. These people deserve improvements right now.

I also wish to mention other groups I have spoken of from time to time. I refer to the railway pensioners, both Canadian National and Canadian Pacific. The minister may tell me this is a little out of his field, but he sits in the cabinet with the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) and others who have connections with these organizations. It is completely unfair that the Canadian National escalation of pensions is still limited to a 2 per cent basis. It is unfair that the basic pension formula for CN employees is poorer than those in the Air Canada pension plan and in the Public Service Superannuation Act.

The Canadian Pacific pension plan is really a disgrace. To tell us that the CPR is a private company and therefore the government cannot touch it does not wash very well with us. It may be a private company in terms of the profit it makes, but it is making its profit from serving the public and charging the public for that service. It gets its whole existence from what this parliament has given to it over the years and I think the government has the right and the duty to tell the CPR, as it must tell the CNR, that the time has come to make tremendous improvements in the pensions of all retired railway workers.

I wish again to put in my plug for retired public servants, including retired armed forces and RCMP personnel. The President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) and I have had many discussions about this. We agree on what has happened and we agree on what ought to be done, but nothing gets done. The escalation of those pensions is still limited by the 2 per cent ceiling. Sometimes the President of the Treasury Board says that he would like to take off that ceiling, but he cannot do so until the Minister of National Health and Welfare removes the 2 per cent ceiling escalation under the Canada Pension Plan.

When the minister talks about the necessity for a review in its totality, there is a very wide totality to be looked at. I welcome the idea of a guaranteed annual income and the suggestion in the throne speech that if a guaranteed annual income cannot be brought in this year or for everyone, it will be good to start with it in certain categories. However, the government can show its good faith in these areas by doing something about the pieces of legislation that are on the books now. I say to the minister and the government that any improvements that are made in these particular pensions plans will not be null and void if we get this over-all approach to income maintenance and security that seems to be the goal of the minister. Therefore, I press all these points on this minister and his colleagues in the cabinet.

I believe, as I have for all the years I have been here, that we are dealing with a most important area when we talk about the right of our people, after the years they have worked, to enjoy retirement in dignity, with justice and security. I strongly urge the minister to do the things we are asking for tonight, that he review the amount of the basic pension that is being provided and, in particular, that he study the whole question of lowering the eligible age to 60, preferably for everybody, with the only rider that an employment test might apply. If he cannot do that,