

Disabled Persons Act

I say in all seriousness that the members of this group should be excused if they face this debate with a certain smugness and self-satisfaction, because their record in this house as far as social security is concerned is unblemished, untarnished and without reproach. Today, when the Prime Minister was speaking, in order to bolster his arguments and sharpen his criticism of the official opposition the only reference he made to this group was to quote from statements we have made on the subject of old age security in years past. I think I have proved that point.

However, we are anxious for this resolution to go through. I am simply rising to express our support for the principle of this resolution which provides for a welcome \$10 increase in pensions paid to disabled persons in addition to an increase in the permissible income, something which his group has urged for a number of years.

I do not wish to repeat the brief comments I made during the debate on the old age security measure except to say that in general what I said on that occasion applies to this resolution. We continue to protest this piecemeal approach to the question of old age security and trust this will be the last time when we shall have to deal with legislation of the present type in this fashion.

Before resuming my seat I should like to bring to the attention of the committee something which has been brought to my notice on numerous occasions with respect to the administration of the Disabled Persons Act. I know the administration of the act is carried out in co-operation with the provincial governments, but I think it is safe to say, judging from the letters and resolutions I have received from various organizations, that the regulations with respect to disability have been somewhat too restrictive. As I say, I am not certain whether that is the responsibility of the federal government or not. I would suggest, however, that consideration be given to introducing a wider definition of disability. I have met several people who have been denied a disability pension though they have obviously been unable to earn a living, unless it is possible to earn a living from a wheelchair handing out tickets, and so on—I know that there is restricted employment of this type, but these men are usually of an age where they would find over-much competition for such jobs when they do exist. To indicate that some thought has been given to this matter, I want to quote from a letter which I received some time ago from the president of the national old age pensioners federation, Saskatoon. Among the suggestions put forward is the following:

That the government be requested to amend the regulation under the Disabled Persons Allowance Act to provide for payment of allowances to persons judged by a medical referee board to be physically incapable of gainful employment.

I think that does provide the basis for an objective approach to a person's physical condition and capacity for employment. That is all I wish to say at this time, because we in this group are anxious to see this legislation go through. I think that in fairness to the members of this group it must be recognized that our remarks have been constructive, restrained and to the point on all occasions.

Mr. Macdonnell: I was in doubt as to whether I should speak at all on this resolution, but as one with even 25 per cent Scottish blood I feel I should say something about the unwarranted attack made by a Sassenach from West Kootenay on a gentleman with the undoubted Scottish background of the hon. member for Stormont.

Having said that, I must confess I have a grievance against the hon. member for Stormont because he made most of my speech.

Mr. Pickersgill: Would the hon. member permit a question? Does he not think that in his introduction he is verging on racial discrimination?

Mr. Macdonnell: There is no racial discrimination among the higher races.

I want to add one or two points to what the hon. member for Stormont said because I was really amazed beyond words to hear the Leader of the Opposition tell us this afternoon that if the government of which he was a member had continued in power there would have been no deficits. Indeed, I can only explain those words by saying to myself that the hon. gentleman had surrounded himself with a cloud of economic experts. I think that is most dangerous. Academic economic experts are dangerous enough, but when you have added to them the businessmen who have turned experts and the journalists who have turned experts I think you have a mixture which can produce strange things. I suggest it did produce a very strange statement this afternoon, because if I understood the Leader of the Opposition correctly he did say in plain English that if they had stayed in power he believed that they would have been able to avoid deficits.

The economic story of the last four years, largely indicated by the hon. member for Stormont, seems to me to be so clear. There were the years after the war when you had pent-up purchasing power; you had a destroyed Europe coming to purchase supplies to rebuild itself, fortified by \$14 billion under the Marshall plan; to that must be added our