

*Old Age Security Act*

person. I frankly feel sorry for him because he had to stand up and apologize for his Government. In his speech, and I am practically quoting him, he said that the Government did not need to apologize for Bill C-40. He is quite correct. The Government asked him to do the apologizing on its behalf. I think it is unfortunate that he was placed in that position since he is such an Hon. Member and a man of integrity and sincerity. I feel quite certain that he would agree with the feelings of his colleague, the Hon. Member for Cape Breton-East Richmond, that a change should be made with respect to the moneys that are received by pensioners who are single and in need of extra assistance.

I would like to say a few words to elaborate on what my colleague, the Hon. Member for Bow River, said so eloquently this morning. I am talking about the failure of the Government to understand the difference between compensation payments and remuneration. As far as I know, this issue first came to light on December 28 last when the secretary in my constituency office received either a phone call or a letter from a constituent of mine who was upset because he was being asked for the first time to report workers' compensation benefits when calculating whether or not he would be entitled to receive GIS benefits.

My secretary, Mrs. Whittingham, was not aware of this problem. She made literally dozens of phone calls to the OAS offices in the London and Toronto districts and to the Revenue Canada offices in the London and Toronto districts. After making these dozens of phone calls, she was still unable to find a single person who knew anything about this matter. Finally, after a couple of weeks, information began to trickle back which indicated that there had indeed been a directive issued in July, 1983, from Revenue Canada that the Workmen's Compensation Board payments were now considered taxable. Some officials were aware of that directive, but officials in other areas were not. My constituency office worked on that problem for about a month.

About four days before I raised the matter in the House, my colleague opposite, the Hon. Member for London West (Mr. Burghardt) asked a question on this matter and received an answer that was quite insignificant. On January 31, I asked the Minister of National Health and Welfare a question on this matter in the House. I received an answer that had been designed to answer another question. I do not fault the Minister personally, but it was obvious that even she had not been briefed by her officials regarding what was actually happening to these 25,000 people who were recipients of GIS and WCB benefits and would suffer a reduction in income.

● (1650)

On January 31, I asked a supplementary question of the Secretary of State. He as well was completely unaware of the issue, as was evidenced by the answer he gave. A few days ago, I again asked a question of the Minister of National Health and Welfare. She was obviously embarrassed to answer the question. She apologized to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) for answering in a way which would not please him. However,

she had obviously been instructed by the Minister of Finance on how to answer the question and that she was to consider a compensation benefit through the Workmen's Compensation Board as being income that should be reported in the calculation of GIS benefits.

I would like to cite an example. It is one which I had in mind this morning and which my colleague, the Hon. Member for Bow River used as an example. However, it bears repeating because it is the kind of example that convinces a person that the Hon. Member for Cape Breton-East Richmond, the Hon. Member for Bow River and others are right. I hope the Minister of National Health and Welfare will see that. Moreover, I hope that the Minister of Finance will see it.

Let us say that a person is working in a plant and, through an accident, loses both eyes. That is very serious and will probably mean that that person will be disabled for the rest of his life as far as being employable is concerned. If our medical technology were sufficiently good, we would be able to replace those two eyes with two workable eyes. Or, if a worker lost a leg we could replace that leg. That day may come. But I would submit that if we were able to replace those two eyes, surely we would not charge that as income to the patient in the calculation of GIS benefits on a subsequent date. Surely we would not say that the replacement of those two eyes should be taken into account when that person is being assessed for GIS benefits. That is exactly what Bill C-139 did, and it has been overlooked again in Bill C-40.

The kind of benefits which we pay to a worker when we cannot replace the two eyes is known as compensation. That was the term used by my colleague from Bow River this morning. It is compensation. It is not remuneration, nor is it income. Society has no other way to recompense that person other than through a cash payment. We are not able to give two new eyes to that person. Therefore, in lieu of two eyes, that patient is given a sum of money. That is the next best thing we can do. That is compensation, not income from a disability plan to which a person may have paid premiums. It is not like income from the Canada Pension Plan into which that person has paid premiums. It is entirely different. That compensation attempts to provide the best which society can provide in this day and age—a recompense to that person for the loss of two eyes. That does not bring that person up to the level of people who have two eyes with which to see. That is what annoys me about the attitude of the Government *vis-à-vis* the handicapped. It has failed to recognize that handicapped people must be brought up to the level of the rest of us who are able-bodied. The Government is assuming that because a person gets a compensation payment for the loss of two eyes, somehow that person has received something extra which should be compared with a benefit that the rest of us who are able-bodied may receive. It does not make sense.

I would like to speak in the strongest terms to supplement what was said earlier by my colleague opposite, by my colleague from the NDP, the Hon. Member for Beaches, by my colleague from Bow River and by the Hon. Member for London West who asked a question of the Minister on January