

Pensions Act

able to bring in legislation which will take into account the special needs of some people over others.

Mr. Speaker, I know there are other hon. members who want to speak on this bill, but I would just ask that we keep in our minds the problems of the blind person. The hon. member for Wellington South (Mr. Hales) brought this out very pointedly. These people need others to assist them to shop. They cannot read the bargains. There are one hundred and one ways in which they are handicapped that those who are not handicapped fail to realize. In conclusion may I say we support this measure, with the added rider that we hope the minister will see fit to go back in date at least to the time when the other old age security pension was increased.

[*Translation.*]

Hon. Paul Martineau (Pontiac-Temisca-tingue): I shall be brief, Mr. Speaker. Like hon. members who spoke before me, I should like to express our group's approval of this legislation which has been made necessary by the increase in old age security pensions and by the increasingly urgent needs of the recipients.

As the hon. member for Perth (Mr. Monteith) and others have stated, it would have been better if the increase had been made retroactive to the date on which old age security payments were boosted.

But, unfortunately, the government did not resort to the necessary consultations with the provinces so as to achieve consistency between the two pension plans.

Mr. Speaker, speaking on this measure, I should like to point out that there is room for improvement with regard to the administration side of it.

I know that the administration of these pensions comes strictly under the provinces which, as a rule, establish a special commission to investigate before making the payments.

However, the federal government determines itself the conditions under which these pensions must be paid.

In many instances, in refusing a pension, the social allowances commission in the province of Quebec, for instance, will inform the person who did not succeed in obtaining a pension, that his or her application is rejected on account of the federal legislation and its requirements.

I submit that this gives rise to many cases of injustice.

In other cases, pensioners had been receiving in good faith for one, or even several years, old age assistance benefits when, as a result of an investigation, it was found out

that the recipient's income was over the permissible maximum. Then the needy person to whom a pension was being paid was compelled to make a refund. In such a case, there is a real injustice, because those persons were receiving that pension in good faith; and it is obvious that they do not have the necessary means to make the refund.

I suggest that when a person has received a pension in good faith, after his good faith has been established through an investigation, he should not be required later on to make a refund.

To judge of the interpretation of the law in cases of this nature, and in order to avoid this rigidity pertaining to all statutes, I suggest that it would be advisable to consider the setting up of a kind of administrative court, which would review the decisions of the commission and before which a claimant might be heard. Thus it would be possible to eliminate, at a moderate cost for the treasury, absolutely pitiful cases of persons who, in our twentieth century and in our society with its population continually increasing, live in almost undescrivable poverty.

Mr. Speaker, care should be taken that this increase, which is not very substantial after all, is not followed by a new rise in the cost of living. It is the special duty of the federal government to see to it that rents in housing projects subsidized by it or by some of its agencies are not increased as soon as the increased pensions are received. There are already indications that this might be the case.

I have no doubt that the minister will make sure that this situation does not occur; she might also warn her colleagues, the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Garland) for instance, of the danger of such an occurrence.

In short, Mr. Speaker, when considering this legislation, it is appropriate that we wonder if the time is not ripe to undertake a review of our social security system.

Our system, as it is now, already drains an important part of our national budget, and yet it remains inadequate and cannot meet the requirements of those who try to become eligible to these benefits. Furthermore, it is obviously inadequate in comparison with the comprehensive systems which exist in most European countries.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that we need to take a second look at the philosophy underlying our social security system. It is not as much a matter of distributing a minimum to all as it is rather one of bringing supplementary assistance to those who need it. I am not against the universality of the portable pension plan, but instead of paying a small amount to everybody, most of whom