

That is why the Federal Government last year arranged for a Special Committee of the Senate and House of Commons to study old age security, both in Canada and elsewhere. In asking Parliament to approve the Old Age Assistance Act, passed last week, and the Old Age Security Act, to be considered later this year, the Federal Government is following the unanimous recommendations of this all-party committee.

OLD AGE ASSISTANCE

The main provisions of the Old Age Assistance Act -- the sharing of costs on a 50-50 basis with the provinces, the setting of the age of eligibility at 65, and the \$40 maximum amount of assistance -- are all in accordance with the recommendations of the Parliamentary Committee and have been discussed with the provinces. The amount of allowable income, including assistance, has been increased from \$600 to \$720 for a single person, and from \$1,080 to \$1,200 for a married couple. Let me emphasize again that this is for those between 65 and 69. There is no means test at all for the universal pension at 70.

While some provinces have indicated that these income ceilings might be too high, others may have some doubts as to the advisability of commencing payment at an age as early as 65. Still others may wish to set additional conditions of eligibility.

The Federal Government, of course, hopes that all provinces will ultimately adopt a uniform pattern in order to take the fullest advantage of the scope of this federal legislation. At the same time, it is not the intention of the Government to impose this new programme on all provinces on a "take it or leave it" basis.

If any province comes to the conclusion that it cannot, for reasons of its own, implement this part of the programme in its jurisdiction at the present time, or that it can only do so on a limited and partial basis, this will not affect the Federal Government's offer as it applies to the other provinces. Nor will it in any way affect the implementation of the universal pensions programme.

One feature of the new Act deserves special mention. Serious criticism has in the past been made of the provision -- which has been in the Old Age Pensions Act since 1927 -- requiring recovery by the provinces from the estates of deceased pensioners. There will be general satisfaction, I am sure, with the decision of the Government to eliminate this requirement from the Old Age Assistance Act.

An addition to the new Act that I should like to emphasize is that our native Indian population will, for the first time, be treated on a basis of complete equality with all other residents of Canada. I am confident that experience will bear out the equity and justice of extending to our Indians the benefits of this new forward step in our social security programme.

As old age assistance will be administered by the provinces, all those who wish to apply for it must wait for directions from their provincial government.

It is estimated that one-third of those in the 65 to 69 age group, or 145,000 persons, will benefit from Old Age Assistance. The cost of this measure will be about \$64,000,000 a year, to be shared equally by the Federal Government and the provinces.