

Suggested Reduction of Pension Age

only have implications for the old age security scheme but for the federal old age assistance program, which should be discussed with the provincial authorities.

Mr. Knowles: Is the hon. member not aware of the fact that anything now in existence without a means test is purely federal, and that the provinces do not come into anything without a means test?

Mr. Francis: I see I am going to have to spell this out in a little more detail for the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). There is a piece of legislation which deals with pensions on a means test basis between the ages of 65 and 70 years, and the adoption of a pension program without a means test after the 67th birthday would certainly have an implication for the existing program of old age security benefits, and at the very least would call for discussions with the provincial authorities. I do not think the hon. member would contend otherwise. I would be surprised if he did.

Mr. Olson: May I ask the hon. member a question. If he reads the motion on the order paper he will see it says "should consider the advisability." Surely that must answer all the objections he raises so far as consultation with the provinces is concerned, because it would naturally be expected that would be part of the consideration of advisability.

Mr. Francis: Again, I am following the discussion which was so ably initiated during private members' hour yesterday by a colleague of the mover of this resolution, who raised the fundamental of the functions of private members' hour. I contend that, at this stage, when there is legislation before the house which deals very specifically with the point raised here, it is not a wise contribution to put the house through this form of discussion, which duplicates the work already being done.

My contention is that if the mover of the motion feels this is the most appropriate form of action, then I suggest to him he has an alternative, and I refer him to the Canada pension bill, No. C-75, which has already been given first reading. Clause 33 of that bill says:

Subject to this part, for each month commencing as described in section 43,

(a) an earnings-related pension shall be paid to a contributor who

(i) has reached 65 years of age and is retired from regular employment, or

(ii) has reached 70 years of age;

That is the point at which the appropriate amendment could be put in specific terms before the house, and I think this would be a more appropriate form of action for the hon. member moving the motion.

There are two or three other basic questions which give me some concern. I have listened in the house to other motions presented by the hon. member and some of his colleagues, motions for which I have had a great deal of sympathy. They have related to the including of such things as mental and t.b. institutions under the Hospital Insurance and Diagnostic Services Act. I have listened to a large number of other resolutions, all of which would have the effect of causing very important expenditures in terms of money. I am aware that money is not the only means by which we judge these matters but, by the arithmetic of the hon. member who introduced this motion, 99,000 persons age 67, as well as 95,000 persons aged 68, and 92,000 persons aged 69, a total of 286,000 persons come into this category.

He estimated that under the old age assistance program approximately 21 per cent of those within the ages 65 to 69 years are currently drawing the means test benefit, and he boosted his estimate to say that something like 200,000 additional persons would be eligible for pension as the result of the adoption of his motion. This would cost something like \$180 million a year, at \$900 a year per person, and it must be remembered that we have the problem of priorities in the expenditure of public funds.

The mover of the motion contended that there was a great deal of hardship, as no doubt there is. There are many families who are too proud to apply for the means test benefit. He is putting forward his proposal that we should extend the federal pension without test of means, without test of retirement, on this basis, and that presumably priority should be given to this action over many other worthy social measures currently before the house.

I admit the hon. member for Medicine Hat (Mr. Olson) does not quite agree with this. If I understood him correctly, he said the retirement test would be a legitimate means of restricting some of the persons in these age groups who have accumulated fairly substantial personal resources in the course of their lives. He also seemed to feel that the purpose of a pension should be to aid employment opportunities for people in the younger age groups, and not to keep older people in jobs while at the same time they are drawing pensions. This is what I understood to be the purport of his remarks. He would differ with the resolution as it is presented to us, by agreeing generally to the kind of retirement test which I understand is incorporated in the Canada pension plan.

Again, we must go back to the whole question of what we are trying to do on an age basis with respect to universal retirement.