

*Pensions Act*

an increase, and the other groups did not get their increase at the same time. This is the way the matter has been handled. We support these amendments and hope that when anything is done with regard to welfare payments in the future the increases will be given to all at the same time. I hope this will be the attitude that will be taken by this or any other government that may be dealing with welfare problems.

**Mr. P. B. Rynard (Simcoe East):** Mr. Speaker, first of all I should like to congratulate the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss LaMarsh) on having an eleventh hour conversion. Some say that deathbed repentances are all right. I congratulate her for bringing in the increase, but how in the name of goodness could she justify leaving these people to the last? Here is a group of people who really need the increase. Their entitlement to it depends upon a means test, and I just cannot see the reasoning behind leaving such people to the last.

I should have liked to see the minister not only make the increase two months retroactive, but go back to April 8 last when the raises for members of the House of Commons came into effect. I think that could only be fair, because surely these people have a proven need. There is not a large amount of money involved in the increase. The matter would seem to be primarily a question of right and wrong, and it does not take a lot of money to make it right because we are told that there are only 103,000 people in Canada who will qualify under the Old Age Assistance Act. This is only one out of every 184 people. In the case of the blind there is only one out of every 2,375 people involved. Therefore I want to ask the minister to reconsider her position and make the increase retroactive at least two months, to the time when the old age security payments were increased. If in the goodness of her heart she could make the increase retroactive to the 8th of April that would be a lot better, because there are only a few people involved and they are people who have a proven need.

So far as the disabled are concerned, here is another group of people who are badly in need. There are only 51,000 of them throughout Canada, or one of every 350 people. We are giving these people \$75 a month. At the same time we allow a single person to earn an extra \$10 a month.

I know that the minister probably cannot do anything at the moment concerning the point I am about to raise but as I look across the way and see the parliamentary secretary to the minister, who lives in Toronto, I say

[Mr. Hales.]

to the minister: How in the world does she expect a person to rent a room and live in Toronto on the amount of money that is provided only under a means test? I am well aware of course that hospitalization and medical care are provided to these people but I am wondering about the cost of drugs so far as they are concerned. Again I remind the minister that these are people whose need is proven. In the case of the disabled we are going to allow a permissible income of \$2,220 a year for a married couple, but in my view this is a mere pittance. A great many of these people, as my doctor friend from Toronto will know, need special care. They need help in their homes. They need someone to go and get things for them. I am sure he will also agree with me that it is an utter impossibility for a married couple to live on that sum of money in the city of Toronto, or other large centres in Ontario.

Let me again draw attention to the discrimination which we practise in this country. It is all very well to speak of universal pensions and national pensions schemes, but surely there is a great difference across Canada in the cost of living in one area compared with another. In my own province of Ontario there is a great difference between a person who has to live in the city of Toronto—I use Toronto because it is a big city, but my observations could easily apply to Ottawa or other cities and towns—and the fortunate person who has to live in some small village, or even on a farm in his own little house. I should like to point out to the minister that over the years we have gone on practising discrimination between the people needing old age assistance or benefits under the Disabled Persons Act or Blind Persons Act who live in the big cities and big towns and those who live in rural areas.

I should like to see some concessions given to disabled persons who suffer additional hardship. I am thinking, for example, of a family I know where the mother finds it necessary to go out to work in order to add to the income. There are a couple of small children in the family and the father has disseminated sclerosis. This lady has to hire a taxi or keep a car to enable her to go to work. Actually in this particular case she hires a taxi. Surely the quality of mercy is not strained by giving these people their just dues, instead of discriminating against them. I should also like to say a few words about disabled persons who need special equipment, such as wheel chairs or special beds. I am thinking of those with disseminated sclerosis, and crippling diseases for example. I hope that some day we will be