

Disabled Persons Act

the person involved, and to obtain any other information they may deem desirable.

I would like to suggest to the hon. member that the regulations as they stand are all right, but the major problem is in their application. The regulations should be the same across Canada. To show what I mean, there is a table giving the percentage of recipients to the total population range. The last figures available are for 1955. They range from .750 in Prince Edward Island to .046 in the Yukon Territory. Taking into account the population, this means that 16 times as many people are drawing this pension in Prince Edward Island as are drawing it in the Yukon Territory. These figures are based upon the percentage of population in these two areas. I certainly agree with the hon. member that these figures show that the regulations are not being applied in each province uniformly.

Mr. Smith: Disabled people do not stay in the Yukon; it is too cold up there.

Mr. Harley: I am sure that would not account for 16 times as much disability. I would like to mention in passing, Mr. Speaker, that the most common age groups in this area of disability are 18 to 19, when the pension is first allowable, and 60 to 64, at which time most of these people become eligible for old age assistance programs.

I agree 100 per cent with the hon. member with regard to the income ceilings. I think these should certainly be raised. There is no question that a great many people spend a large part of their income on buying drugs for their disability. I think it would be a very simple thing to allow bills for drugs to be added to the income ceilings. Drugs these days are very expensive and I am sure they could take practically all the pension allowed for some illnesses. I would also agree that the allowances are not suitable and should be graded.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say I am sorry if I have misinterpreted what the hon. member has said, but at the present time I think many of the things he is looking for could be achieved if the application of the regulations was changed. In my opinion the application of regulations could be changed in such a way as to make them more uniform and more applicable across the country.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, the attendance in the house and the galleries is not quite as large now as it was between 2.30 and five o'clock, but to a great many Canadians—in fact, to

[Mr. Harley.]

far too many—the matter we are now discussing is of very great importance. I commend the hon. member for Simcoe North (Mr. Smith) for presenting this motion again this session as he did last session. I hope that one of these days what he asks for will be attained. It is not necessary to speak at any length to indicate our support of this motion; I indicated that support when this same proposition was before the house at the last session. However, I would like to take just a moment to thank the hon. member for Halton (Mr. Harley) for supporting the proposition, but at the same time to express my disagreement with him when he suggests there is nothing wrong with the regulations and that all that is wrong is the manner in which those regulations are applied.

If I recall correctly, during the course of his remarks he himself quoted from the act and from the regulations setting out the definition of "total disability". I submit that that definition is itself a barrier preventing many people receiving the allowance under the Disabled Persons Act. We have all had experience with this act. We have all had experience with people who have been denied the benefit that is available under it for the simple reason that they could still feed themselves and look after themselves in the most elementary ways. What we are concerned about is that the definition itself be broadened so that people who are disabled in the ordinary sense, as we know them and as we see them, can get the benefit of this act.

It does seem to me, Mr. Speaker, that in relation to this piece of legislation, as in relation to other pieces of social security legislation, parliament should in this affluent age be much more generous than we have been thus far. We sometimes tend to pride ourselves on the number of pieces of social legislation that have been put on the statute books during the past 40 years, and therefore we think we have done a good job. I submit that in terms of our capacity and in terms of the needs that some of our people suffer we really have not done very well at all.

I shall have something more to say on this general subject the next day that private members' notices of motions are called, because the very next one on the list is in my name and calls for doing something about filling the major gaps in this country's social security program. Therefore I need say nothing more on this occasion. I simply want to support wholeheartedly the request that