

Pensions Act

receive the \$10 increase to which they are entitled and will receive it at the end of this month.

Therefore what I wish to say I shall capsule very quickly into four brief points. First I would like to support wholeheartedly the suggestion of my colleague the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre that the government and we in this house must start thinking in terms of a comprehensive social security program for Canada. The patchwork system we have now leaves a great many gaps in the social security program. Anyone who has taken even a cursory glance at the social security systems in the Scandinavian countries, western Europe and Great Britain will know that only with a comprehensive program can you be sure there is not a great deal of suffering and a great deal of privation. We have a social security program that goes forward in fits and starts, depending on public pressure and the ability of certain groups to organize and express their disapproval. But the smaller groups which suffer from the lack of an adequate social security program are hardly ever heard, and the result is that they are often neglected and forgotten.

So I do wish to press for the early consideration of an adequate social security program that will be comprehensive in scope and will really make Canada a humanitarian, welfare society.

Second, I was pleased to hear the minister say that her department is giving thought to a new approach to these shared programs; that instead of a means test we are going to begin thinking in terms of a needs test. It is possible to measure income, but this does not measure need.

The hon. member for Simcoe East talked about the cost of living in different parts of the country, but in addition to that problem one also has to keep in mind that there is a difference in the cost of living for two people living in the same community. One person may require expensive drugs such as insulin or aureomycin or may need a special diet. One person may live under certain conditions as a result of which he requires more assistance than another person who is enjoying comparatively good health. Therefore, if we are going to keep up to date in the kind of welfare program which has become commonplace in the western world, we have to reorganize these shared programs so as to provide for a needs test basis rather than a means test basis.

This is particularly true in the case of disabled persons. I am not going to take the time of the committee to remind hon. members of what everyone knows, that the present Disabled Persons Act is so rigid in its regulations that it really applies only to persons

who are almost totally helpless and completely incapacitated. Yet there are thousands of people in Canada who are unemployable to all intents and purposes. They are not completely incapacitated but they are incapacitated in so far as it is possible for them to earn a living. A needs test could be applied to people of this kind. Probably they do not need as much as a person who is bedridden, but they do need sufficient to enable them to live in decency and comfort without having to be treated as relief recipients.

The third point I wish to make is to suggest to the minister that consideration be given to doing what the Scandinavian countries have done for a number of years, namely tie pensions to the cost of living index. We tend to sit back, let the cost of living go up, and when it has risen so far that it has eaten up all of the increase we gave these recipients we then boost the pension. A d.b.s. daily bulletin which I received a short time ago shows that the cost of living in the last two months has risen to 134, an increase of six tenths of 1 percentage point, making it the highest cost of living in our history. It has gone up 2.1 percentage points in the past 12 months. This means that as the cost of living goes up the buying capacity of these pensions declines. I think there is a good deal to be said for tying these pensions to the cost of living so that without legislation the department would be able to adjust pensions automatically every quarter or biannually in conformity with the rising cost of living.

The last point I want to make is to join my voice with those of almost every other member who has spoken in urging the minister to give further consideration to the effective date of this legislation. As has been pointed out, these shared programs are on a means test basis which means that those who are recipients have virtually no other income. They are almost completely dependant on the payments made under this legislation. If there are any groups that need the \$10 a month increase certainly they are the old age assistance pensioners, the blind pensioners and the recipients of disabled persons allowances. It seems, therefore, most ironic that they should be deprived of the increase for two months when it has been given to old age security pensioners, all of whom are not in the same necessitous circumstances as are those in these groups.

The minister takes refuge in the fact that she had to consult with the provinces and that the provinces indicated that December 1 was about as far back as they were prepared to go. I am not quarrelling about consulting with the provinces. I am suggesting, however, that