

Where does the fault lie, Mr. Speaker? Here is the explanation I get from one side. In a letter dated July 3, 1973, which I should like to put on the record in part, the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) wrote:

Although it is usual for a country to pay its old age pensions to all eligible persons residing within its territory, the same general practice does not apply to persons living abroad. Some countries do not pay such pensions abroad to anyone excepting under very special conditions. Others pay them abroad only to their own eligible nationals. The United Kingdom and Canada pay their pensions abroad to both nationals and aliens who are eligible, whereas the only eligible aliens to whom the United States pays its pensions abroad are those who are nationals of countries which will pay social security benefits abroad in full to their beneficiaries who are U.S. nationals.

From time to time a country may increase the rates of old age pensions payable. Whenever such adjustments are made to Canadian old age security pensions and to Canada Pension Plan benefits, they are payable unconditionally to all recipients residing anywhere abroad, including the United Kingdom, by virtue of Canadian legislation alone, without the need for reciprocal agreements between Canada and the other countries concerned. On the other hand, it is our understanding that the United Kingdom pays such increases abroad only in those countries with which it has reciprocal agreements or arrangements on social security.

As you have indicated, such an arrangement exists between the United States and the United Kingdom. It will be clear from the above information that by virtue of this arrangement, pensioners of the United States who are not U.S. citizens are able to enjoy their full U.S. pensions in the United Kingdom, though they would not be able to do so if the arrangement in question did not exist. Meanwhile, pensioners of Canada, no matter what their nationality, are able to enjoy full Canadian benefits in the United Kingdom. Similarly, there is no impediment to the British government paying increases to United Kingdom pensioners in Canada by virtue of their legislation alone, should they wish to do so.

I emphasize "should they wish to do so", Mr. Speaker. Here is what I hear from the other side, because in my search for the truth and to find out where the problem lies I have entered into correspondence with a number of members of the British parliament and in particular with the minister directly concerned in the British government. What he tells me is a reiteration of the statement concerning the eligibility of persons drawing pensions in a foreign country at the rate current when they left Britain or when they first became entitled after emigrating. Subsequent increases are payable only in countries which have undertaken, in reciprocal agreements, to pay unconditional pensions.

In my correspondence I suggested that Canada was ready to sign an agreement with the United Kingdom and that the United Kingdom was reluctant. This was on the basis of correspondence I had had with the minister. I quote part of the reply of the British minister as follows: I should say at once that the opposite is true. Since before 1970 it has been our desire to conclude a comprehensive social security reciprocal agreement with Canada and in the course of the last three years draft proposals have been transmitted to the Canadian government on three occasions, the last in March of this year, to which a reply is awaited.

Mr. Speaker, I find this extremely confusing. You will therefore understand why I am at a loss to explain this anomaly to people who come to me for advice and ask what can be done. It seems to me a matter of concluding an agreement with Britain. Why have we not done so? What is the hold-up? Many of those for whom I speak arrived here at middle-age and when they reach the age of

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65 they are not, except in rare cases, eligible for the Canadian old age pension since they are unlikely to have lived in Canada for the required 20 years. For this reason, if for no other, I urge the minister and the government to hasten the conclusion of an agreement with the United Kingdom on social security.

● (1720)

I cannot conclude my remarks without mentioning two other classes of disadvantaged persons. Others have mentioned them and perhaps I may be allowed to do so. Something ought to be done soon to permit housewives to contribute to the pension plan, so that they too may receive the pension in their own right, as they deserve. Something must also be done to ensure equivalent treatment for widows and widowers. If a man loses his wife, as I understand it his pension is not reduced; but if a woman loses her husband, her pension is reduced automatically and drastically. Why should this be? Why should one partner of a marriage be treated as less than an equal in the partnership? This defect must be eliminated from our legislation. The legislation we are presently considering may not be the vehicle for doing that, but we must not lose the opportunity when it arises to correct these inequities.

Having made this triple call for justice for British immigrants, housewives and widows, I resume my seat, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Rod Blaker (Lachine-Lakeshore): Mr. Speaker, I rise, as have many other members of the House, to express my satisfaction with Bill C-224 and, to be consistent with many other members, to emphasize that this bill through its provisions is simply a vehicle for bringing about a better social security system for Canadians.

I intend to be brief, for which hon. members may be thankful, and discuss only two concepts. They are the social guidelines and the philosophy which produced this bill. I shall make a comment or two about our obligation to extend that philosophy and to see to it that our citizens are increasingly brought into contact with this kind of program and given more information. Secondly I shall comment on what I call the hard dollars involved in this program. I also hope that the bill will be passed as quickly as possible because as members of this House know many Canadian citizens are waiting to benefit from its improvements.

The purpose of any social security system is to assure to all the citizens of Canada a decent, human and humane standard of living. The class of Canadian citizen to which our obligation is perhaps greatest is the one consisting of our senior citizens who have devoted their lives and working years in working for our benefit in order that we may enjoy a better place in which to live. Yet bearing in mind the intention behind our social security programs, we must recognize that, perhaps because of the complexities of interrelated and parallel provincial and federal programs, not all our people are the beneficiaries.

Let me give an example from the riding that I represent. I emphasize that I represent one of the wealthiest regions in Canada. The people are among the most highly educated and the most mobile. It is one of our most highly industrialized regions. Yet I still hear of women who are