

*Pensions Act*

before us, that is Bill No. C-125, would provide for an increase to at least \$120 a month in the allowances paid under the Old Age Assistance Act, the Blind Persons Act and the Disabled Persons Act.

[Text]

**Mr. A. D. Hales (Wellington South):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity of saying a few words on the amendment now before the house to increase by \$10 per month the payments made under the Old Age Assistance Act, the Disabled Persons Act and the Blind Persons Act. I would say this is one of the most confused and poorly handled pieces of legislation that has ever come before this house. Our senior citizens were given a \$10 increase as of October 1 last, and only then after considerable pressure was brought to bear by the opposition. The other three classes of people receiving assistance were left wondering why they did not receive this increase, as they had on other occasions when similar legislation was put through. I had 'phone call after 'phone call; I had letters from people in these three categories. They were asking me, "How come I am not getting the \$10 a month increase, the same as the senior citizens?" What could we tell them? What did we tell them? All we could tell them was that this government failed to consult the provinces and the matter had to be postponed until after the dominion-provincial conference meeting, that at that time it would be discussed and possibly the increase would be put into effect.

The people in these categories have been discriminated against. Why should they be discriminated against? They are just as entitled to this \$10 increase as are our senior citizens. They are people who may need this additional money even more than those in the senior citizens group, but for at least two months they have been denied this increase. This means they have been denied \$20, which is a large sum of money to them. Speaking for myself, I certainly would have preferred to see the senior citizens, old age assistance recipients and the blind and disabled get their increase in their pensions before there was any increase in the indemnity of members of parliament.

**An hon. Member:** Did you vote against it?

**Mr. Hales:** In addition, our increase was made retroactive while the increase for our senior citizens was not made retroactive.

**Mr. Moreau:** Would the hon. member permit a question?

**Mr. Hales:** Yes.

**Mr. Moreau:** Would the hon. member inform the house how he voted when the members' pay increase was before us?

**Mr. Hales:** I voted for it just as the hon. member did, but I still say I would have preferred to see the senior citizens receive their increase before we were given ours.

The increase for these three groups is going to cost \$4.2 million for four months or approximately \$12.6 million a year. The hon. lady has not seen fit to tell us from where the money is going to come from or how it is going to be raised. I presume it will come from the consolidated revenue fund. However, she did make a point of telling us in the case of the old age security increase that the money was going to be raised by increasing the income tax by 1 per cent. So there is confusion in the method of payment between these two categories. The matter has been poorly handled all along. It has been done in a confused and piecemeal way. We are now asked to pass this amendment today and I may say we are going to support it.

Before I sit down I should like to say a word or two in respect of blind assistance. I think these people deserve special recognition. In my opinion a blind person has a much higher cost of living and finds it more difficult to exist than other people. This observation can be substantiated on three or four grounds. Many times blind people have to hire help to take care of them in their homes. They cannot see to get around and they need guidance. Quite often they have to live in a different type of home than other people. They cannot live in homes with three or four floors but must live in single ground floor homes so that they can get around. There are special circumstances in the case of blind people and as a result it costs them more to live. In some cases it is a necessity for them to have a car. If they have one they need someone at all times to drive them to their place of work and pick them up. This too is an additional expense. When blind people go shopping they are handicapped. They cannot see the product they are buying or the specials that are on sale, so they are not always able to take advantage of these savings. For these reasons and others I think they should be given special consideration and I hope the day will come when this will be a reality. There are only about 8,000 blind pensioners in Canada, as I believe the minister indicated, and an additional \$10 a month for them would not amount to a very large sum.

Finally, I say that this government stands condemned because of its failure to legislate in a clear and fair way for the less fortunate people of our country. They have acted in a discriminatory manner. One group received