

Alleged Non-Institution of Just Society

Here is another letter written on behalf of eight women. I quote:

I wonder if anything can be done about getting the retiring age for women with pension at 55 years—well, 60 years at the latest. Other countries have it. As you know, a woman's work is never finished, that is if she works out as many have to do, and then keep her home tidy, etc., etc. Well, you being a woman would understand better than any man.

It would be nice to have a few years to enjoy before we are crippled with poor health. As for me, my heart is not as good as it should be. I am 58 years old. It will kill me to work until 65 years, as I have to support myself.

I know others that feel the same way but have to drag themselves to work. The boss wonders why we don't stay home. They don't know what it's like to have to shop, cook, and clean up in the evening after work. No wonder we have no life, nor the speed young girls have. It would also make jobs for those young people, and we could do baby sitting or community work part-time. How far in the near future could this be expected? I would appreciate hearing from you on this subject.

I would like to ask the members of the government to answer that question. How far in the future is the guaranteed income program? Why do women like these eight, and many more—widows, single women, elderly women—have to exist on these small pittances, or else go out to work and ruin their health, at a time when they should be enjoying a few years of leisure? And all this is at a time when there are thousands of young people anxiously seeking jobs.

Here is another letter I received:

I am soon to be 48 years of age and most of these years I have lived in poverty. As a child I was poor because I was one of a large family. My father was a professional man who thought more of his code of ethics than he did of money. He was a good father, and he had a good kind wife. Together they gave us a happy childhood, although a very poor one as far as material things went.

My husband, whom I married at age 19, was a good and kind person and a real hard worker, who willingly turned his hand to any type of work to earn our living. He had a physical handicap due to polio as a child, which caused a bitter battle with his ego. However, he continued to do the work of two men, in a vain effort to make something of our lives. In our third year of marriage I was stricken with rheumatoid arthritis, which left me bedridden off and on for the next 15 years. My husband not only had to earn our living, but also do the housework and look after our three children who fortunately were five and seven years apart. In this way they were able to help each other. During this period we had to pay for doctors, hospital and medicine. At one time it cost us \$6.50 per day for medicine for six weeks, then \$6.50 every second day for three months.

I know this woman and I know she is telling the truth.

At this time my husband was earning \$10 per day working in the mines. So you can see we had to go into debt to make me comfortable. Hell on earth is what it really was. We were always behind the 8-ball.

Yes, and the government talks about pockets of poverty.

Never a chance for our children or ourselves to have any of the things others in normal circumstances have. So in other words because we were handicapped we were forced to live in the miserable existence of poverty. But this was not the end.

No, it sure wasn't. Just at the time I started to improve enough to take over my share of the responsibility in the home, when things started to look a little brighter, the muscles in

[Mrs. MacInnis.]

my husband's back had deteriorated due to the polio. Away we went again as now my husband could no longer do the heavy type of work he knew. So what do you do after the unemployment insurance runs out? Of course you go and beg for welfare.

We were on welfare for approximately four years, and if things had been done right we need only have been on it from six months to one year at the most. But due to red tape, negligence and just not caring by those handling our case, the situation was allowed to continue. It only took six months for his retraining. This not only cost the taxpayer a lot of money but our family a lot of unnecessary misery—and almost ruined one of our boys, who at that time was 12 years old, an age when a boy needs all the confidence in himself and his parents that he can muster—

If it was just us I wouldn't mind, but when I know that there are millions of poverty stricken families like our's in Canada, it is a bitter pill to swallow. I also think of our children—our foster children—and perhaps more than this our grandchildren—as they are also just one step from welfare and poverty.

You doubtless are wondering why I have written my story. This is why. For the past 32 months I have been working as an advocate with a citizen's group in Victoria. I have handled approximately 1,500 cases of people living in poverty. So with this experience, plus my own life, I feel I am quite knowledgeable on the problems or perhaps I should say symptoms of poverty.

These are the people who need a guaranteed income, not bums and lowdown people who flourish in the imagination of persons like the parliamentary secretary over there. These are Canadians just like the rest of us, people to whom we deny the right to have a decent living, and we deny them that right in the name of all kinds of things.

I want to read another letter sent to me, copy of an open letter sent to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) by one of my constituents:

Sir;

I have refrained for a lifetime of close to 70 years (in the span of which I have been sorely tempted) from writing to the press or to those who govern me. But I have reached a point of compulsion beyond denial to exercise my democratic right as one of the governed to appeal to him who governs. I shall deny myself the right to speak either in anger or indignation but ask only the right of the little man to his democratic right to a hearing.

I know, sir, that your burden as Head of Government is heavy, and for your labour accept my ready thanks. But there is to any coin another side—and there are, sir, in this land which I love with honest pride, thousands of Canadians who looked to you, and put you in power, and who still look to you to fulfil your promise of the "just society".

Can you, sir, look upon your work and say you have brought about the "just society"? Can you, sir, in good faith in confrontation with your people, your God, or your conscience, accept as a measure of the fulfilment of your "just society" an increase of 42 cents per month to those Canadians who have laboured so long to make this land, and so little to live for? Can you, sir, a few months later announce an increase (not here in question) of \$8,000 per year (much of it tax free and retroactive) to yourself and all other Members of Parliament? If you are able to do this, sir, God forgive you! Many thousands of Canadians, I am sure, will not!

History, because of its nature, cannot deny you, nor can it fail to record you. Think, sir, it may be of little moment to you now, but posterity is timeless. Consult your friends, your family, your priest, your party, and above all your conscience. Let's have the fulfilment of your promise. Let's have the "just society". It is in your hands.