

Pensions Act

Mr. Gilbert Rondeau (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a few comments on Bill C-125, the purpose of which is to increase the benefits now being paid under the Old Age Assistance Act, the Disabled Persons Act and the Blind Persons Act.

Like those who spoke before me, I support with more or less limited enthusiasm this increase of \$10 for the persons aged 65 to 70, for the disabled and the blind. But it is to be noted that this increase is far below the increase in the cost of living.

Last summer, sometime before the recess, nearly all hon. members were in favour of increasing their own indemnity. Everyone was saying that the cost of living had gone up, and that therefore, expenses had increased that much.

Well, I think that if our expenses and our cost of living have increased, they have also gone up for the old people, the disabled and the blind who have no other source of income nor any other means than the benefits paid to them under our present laws.

If you draw a parallel between the increase in our indemnity and the increase in old age assistance, and disabled and blind allowances, those benefits should have been raised to about \$120 a month, but they are now increased to \$75 only.

No one is disputing the fact that the cost of living has gone up, that the cost of everything is going up. The needs of our old, disabled and needy people are the same as ours, that is to say their cost of living is the same as ours. But when it comes to suggesting an increase based on the cost of living, it seems that often we think more about ourselves than about other people.

A single person in receipt of old age assistance or blind persons allowances will be able as from now to have a \$1,260 yearly income, while the recipient of an allowance for the blind will be entitled to an annual income of \$1,500.

For the person who is married and living with his spouse, the permissible income will be \$2,220 in the case of old age assistance and disability allowances, and \$2,580 in the case of allowances for the blind.

Considering the number of civil servants necessary to interview the disabled, the blind and the old age assistance recipients, I feel it would cost no more to grant \$75 a month, without assessing the income earned by the spouse.

I am thinking of several cases I know, where the wife has to work in order to support herself. Because her salary is a few dollars above the permissible amount under the act, her government pension has been cut down. As a matter of fact, I was able to establish that, in the province of Quebec,

[Mr. Marcoux.]

the additional amount provided by the federal government, that is \$10, has been deducted from the pension of the recipients of social assistance benefits.

I wish to point out to the minister that today, in order to derive any benefits from the Disabled Persons Act, one has to be a bed-ridden invalid as several members have already stated.

I am thinking more particularly of people who have a heart condition. When we request pensions on behalf of those people, the commissioners tell us that the persons are not completely or permanently disabled, despite the fact that their illness often puts them in what I would call a state of helplessness.

The administration of the Old Age Assistance Act, the Disabled Persons Act and the Blind Persons Act is so restrictive that several inquiries are often needed before justice is obtained from the commission, and in a few cases only at that.

That is why I feel it would be easier to pay \$75 a month without a means test as far as the spouse is concerned. The number of employees needed for the administration of the act must be taken into account; it requires bureaucracy and a number of bureaucrats. And even if it makes it possible for the provincial or the federal government to save a few dollars, it prevents some recipients from really trying to earn more money.

In that respect, I am reminded of a woman who, at some time tells herself: What I earn in such and such a month is taken from me by the federal or the provincial government because of the maximum set on permissible income.

Mr. Speaker, we welcome this measure to increase by \$10 a month the pensioners' permissible income but, on the other hand, I must say that this increase is not in line with the cost of living at this time or the numerous needs of the disabled, the blind and the old.

If you consider the cost of living today and the way old people must live, you will find that they do not live in the same conditions that prevailed 25 or 30 years ago when children looked after old people. Times have changed and today, because of the housing shortage, old people must live alone and look after themselves.

That is why I feel that the increases as mentioned in the bill are not large enough, for one must remember that we have increased our sessional allowance by some 80 per cent, whereas the blind, the disabled and the older people benefits are increased by \$10 a month only.

If the increase in the cost of living or in these people's requirements had been taken into account, I think that the measure now