

Disabled Persons Act

under the proposed Canadian pension plan—for example those who never complete two years' contributions. There are many people who fall into that category at the present time, people who drift on from one relief roll to another. They will never come within the ambit of the proposed Canada pension act.

The third matter which I think should be taken into consideration concerns the benefits which are proposed. They are too low in the case of those who are disabled and unemployed. The benefits will not help the people who need them most. Surely the government's first responsibility is to help those least able to help themselves.

I would like to turn for a moment to another related part of the Disabled Persons Act—and this also applies to blind persons' pensions—and that is income ceilings. Income ceilings are very low. Where a wife or a husband is disabled, the earnings of the working spouse are considered in the eligibility of the disabled spouse for a pension. In most cases where either the husband or the wife is paraplegic extra expenses are involved in the home, but because of a very modest income on the part of the working member of the family they are disqualified. I know of one instance where a wife works and her husband's drug bill is something like \$60 a month. Therefore I suggest the earnings of the working spouse should not be considered in fixing the income ceilings of such people under Disabled Persons Act.

Another instance which has come to my attention concerns the case of a wife in a wheelchair. The oldest daughter is kept at home to keep house. The father is the operator of a small farm, and the income is something like \$1,500. They are disqualified under the act, and the daughter has to stay at home instead of earning.

There has recently been held in Ottawa a very fine conference on the family, which dealt with how to keep families together. I should like to suggest that one very practical and speedy way to help families with a disabled mother or father who are struggling to keep the family unit together is by lifting the income ceiling and paying the disabled person's pension, regardless of the earnings of the working spouse. I think the same provision as to income ceiling should apply to families where the wife is blind. In such cases there are always extra expenses involved, no matter how skilled she is. There are many matters which call for outside assistance. Insufficient use is made of food and many tasks have to be done by outside

[Mr. Smith.]

help. If a man is on a modest income and his wife is blind I think she should get the blind person's pension regardless of her income. This would help this sort of family. I realize our hospitals are crowded, but the present provisions of the act and the regulations under the act tend to keep a family apart. They tend to force a family to put a disabled member into a hospital or nursing home. It is always cheaper to keep disabled persons in their own homes.

Since this matter is not of the controversial nature of the one we have just been dealing with, I hope everyone will support it; and I am sure the government will get very quick action if they take the necessary steps I have suggested.

Mr. H. C. Harley (Halton): Mr. Speaker, I should like to say a few words on the hon. member's notice of motion. First of all, I should like to put a few facts on the record in connection with disability pensions. As all hon. members know, these pensions were first brought in in 1954. Since that time the numbers of pensioners have been increasing. In 1963 there were 50,621 people who received the pension, at a cost to the government, as part of course of a shared program with the provinces, of almost \$20 million. The same year there were 17,659 applications, of which 5,500 odd were approved, something over 11,000 were declined, and 780 were either withdrawn by the applicant or the person involved passed away. Of the 11,500 which were declined, over 10,000 were turned down on medical reasons.

At the present time the federal administration of this plan is under the old age assistance division of the welfare branch of the Department of National Health and Welfare. That branch is responsible for the federal administration of disabled persons allowances. The medical features of the act are the responsibility of the medical rehabilitation division of the health branch. Medical decisions on applications are made both by the provincial and the federal medical examiners. At the present time there are federal-provincial agreements for sharing the cost of special medical examinations and medical referees. I should like to say in passing that, having been a medical practitioner, I certainly agree with the hon. member that we should simplify the application forms. They are very complicated and take a great deal of time to complete.

I am also interested in the hon. member's fourth point concerning permanent unemployment. I am not sure in my own mind