



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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CANADA'S NEW PROGRAMME FOR OLD AGE SECURITY

A broadcast by the Minister of National Health and Welfare, Mr. Paul Martin, over the Trans-Canada Network of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, on July 3, 1951.

CANADA PROVIDES FOR OLD AGE SECURITY

We have just celebrated the 84th Anniversary of the Confederation of Canada.

As we begin the 85th year of our national life we find that, in spite of temporary difficulties, the Canadian economy has never been more buoyant. Sir Wilfrid Laurier once said that this would be Canada's Century. Certainly, we have come a long way towards making his dream come true. As proof of the Government's confidence in Canada's productive capacity and of its faith in Canada's future this year will be marked by a programme to provide greatly increased security for our senior citizens.

This programme to provide assistance for those in need at 65 and a pension - without a means test - for all Canadians at 70 will be implemented by two Acts of Parliament. One, the Old Age Assistance Act, was passed by Parliament last week. The other, the Old Age Security Act, will be presented for Parliament's approval later this year.

It is a symbol of our progress and of our concern for social justice that in these critical times -- when so much of our productive strength must be diverted to defence requirements -- we still give priority to the well-being of our people. When this new programme for old age security is fully in effect, all Canadians in the 65 to 69 age group who are in need of assistance will receive it, and all those who are 70 and over will receive a monthly pension, without means test.

By these new measures for old age assistance and universal pensions, 860,000 of our older citizens will benefit. These are the men and women who have served our country so faithfully during the first half of this century.

ALL PARTIES APPROVE NEW PROGRAMME

Parliament passed our present Old Age Pensions Act in 1927. Since that time, a great deal of thought has been given to this question of providing for the well-being of our older citizens, and many improvements have been made in the original Act. In the past four years, almost as much has been done to improve Old Age Pensions as in the preceding twenty.

There was, however, no question in our minds that more could be done.

That is why the Federal Government last year arranged for a Special Committee of the Senate and House of Commons to study old age security, both in Canada and elsewhere. In asking Parliament to approve the Old Age Assistance Act, passed last week, and the Old Age Security Act, to be considered later this year, the Federal Government is following the unanimous recommendations of this all-party committee.

OLD AGE ASSISTANCE

The main provisions of the Old Age Assistance Act -- the sharing of costs on a 50-50 basis with the provinces, the setting of the age of eligibility at 65, and the \$40 maximum amount of assistance -- are all in accordance with the recommendations of the Parliamentary Committee and have been discussed with the provinces. The amount of allowable income, including assistance, has been increased from \$600 to \$720 for a single person, and from \$1,080 to \$1,200 for a married couple. Let me emphasize again that this is for those between 65 and 69. There is no means test at all for the universal pension at 70.

While some provinces have indicated that these income ceilings might be too high, others may have some doubts as to the advisability of commencing payment at an age as early as 65. Still others may wish to set additional conditions of eligibility.

The Federal Government, of course, hopes that all provinces will ultimately adopt a uniform pattern in order to take the fullest advantage of the scope of this federal legislation. At the same time, it is not the intention of the Government to impose this new programme on all provinces on a "take it or leave it" basis.

If any province comes to the conclusion that it cannot, for reasons of its own, implement this part of the programme in its jurisdiction at the present time, or that it can only do so on a limited and partial basis, this will not affect the Federal Government's offer as it applies to the other provinces. Nor will it in any way affect the implementation of the universal pensions programme.

One feature of the new Act deserves special mention. Serious criticism has in the past been made of the provision -- which has been in the Old Age Pensions Act since 1927 -- requiring recovery by the provinces from the estates of deceased pensioners. There will be general satisfaction, I am sure, with the decision of the Government to eliminate this requirement from the Old Age Assistance Act.

An addition to the new Act that I should like to emphasize is that our native Indian population will, for the first time, be treated on a basis of complete equality with all other residents of Canada. I am confident that experience will bear out the equity and justice of extending to our Indians the benefits of this new forward step in our social security programme.

As old age assistance will be administered by the provinces, all those who wish to apply for it must wait for directions from their provincial government.

It is estimated that one-third of those in the 65 to 69 age group, or 145,000 persons, will benefit from Old Age Assistance. The cost of this measure will be about \$64,000,000 a year, to be shared equally by the Federal Government and the provinces.

NEW LEGISLATION FOR THE BLIND

The present Old Age Pensions Act also includes provisions for blind persons from the age of 21. These provisions have now been replaced by a separate Blind Persons Act, as recommended by the leading associations for the blind. This Act, which also was passed last week, will become effective on January 1 next. In a number of ways this Act will make more generous the conditions governing the allowances already being paid to blind Canadians. An additional number of more than 2,000 blind persons will be able to benefit from this Act's special provisions and from the universal pension that blind persons, too, will receive at 70.

THE UNIVERSAL PENSION AT 70

While the Federal Government will pay half of the cost of old age assistance, it will assume the entire responsibility for financing the cost of universal pensions to be provided for in the Old Age Security Act. Under the terms of this Act, anyone in Canada who has reached the age of 70 and who can qualify under the residence requirement, will receive \$40 a month without means test of any kind.

As the Prime Minister pointed out recently, these universal pensions, from the start, will have a contributory feature, and every person who has sufficient resources to contribute towards the cost of the universal pension will be required to do so.

For this universal pension, there will be a residence qualification similar to that for old age assistance, but otherwise it will be paid to everyone in Canada -- to citizen or non-citizen, and to the Indians, the first Canadians.

The cost of this measure, which will benefit some 715,000 persons -- almost half of whom are now in receipt of old age pensions -- will be about \$343,000,000 a year.

BETTER PROVISION FOR OLD AGE

This new two-fold programme for old age security is one of the outstanding social advances of our time in Canada. It is a programme that other countries will admire and that some, I am sure, will want to imitate.

This is a programme of which every Canadian can be proud. The provinces have collaborated in its development through the years, and I know that they will continue to play their part in that portion of the new programme in which they share the financial responsibility.

I should like to recall what I said in the House of Commons ten days ago, in reference to this new provision for Canada's older citizens.

The history of this quarter-century, from 1926 to 1951, is the story of our awakening as a nation to a new understanding of what we can do, through government, for our older citizens and for their security. This concern for our senior citizens is the touchstone to the true quality of our way of life.

When the measure is taken in later years of recent progress in Canada, it will be seen even more clearly than now that this generation has developed an enlightened concept of social justice, and a sure recognition of the fact that government has no more honorable responsibility than to work for the well-being of its people.

What we have done this past week to provide assistance for Canadian men and women at 65, and to provide added protection for the blind, and what we will do before this year is out to complete our pattern for old age security, will bring Canada in this field into the forefront of the nations. Canada's old age security programme is a symbol of our determination to work for the well-being of all our citizens. Like every measure of social progress, this programme will count heavily on our side in the struggle against Communism and against all other alien and heartless systems in which the individual, young or old, is the last and not the first concern of government.

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