

Elderly Hardest Hit By Economic Crunch



— Jack Anderson —

IN A SOCIETY enamored with youth, an estimated five million senior citizens have been overtaken in their old age by poverty.

Most of them collect pitiful pensions, which have dwindled in purchasing power as the cost of living has soared out of sight. For many, the economic crunch has become truly a life-or-death matter.

Their pathetic stories are told in letters that have been made available to us from the private files of the National Council of Senior Citizens.

"These people that keep bragging about how much they are giving the senior citizen should have to live on it themselves," wrote a man from Gouverneur, N.Y. "It has been eight months since I have had a piece of meat."

HE IS LUCKY. Some live on rolls, coffee and dog food. Food fit for a dog at least provides protein at low cost. Some old folks have turned in desperation into thieves, rifling meat counters and grocery shelves. But most are too proud for such degradation and suffer with quiet dignity.

A staff memo, prepared for the Senate Special Committee on Aging, notes grimly: "All age groups have felt the impact of spiraling inflation in one form or another. But older Americans have probably been victimized to a much greater extent than any other segment in our society . . ."

"Rising food costs have been especially

oppressive for the elderly because about 27 per cent of their budgets is spent on food, in contrast to 16 per cent for the total population. The net impact is that this upward spiral can have the effect of obliterating the 20 per cent Social Security increase."

For those on fixed incomes, the situation is so desperate that committee chairman Frank Church (Dem-Idaho) will try to move up the effective date of a forthcoming 5.9 per cent Social Security increase for senior citizens from July to January.

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THE UNPUBLISHED memo stresses the importance of Social Security to the elderly. "For most older Americans," states the memo, "Social Security represents their economic mainstay. It constitutes almost the entire source of support for almost one out of every seven aged couples and two out of every seven elderly single individuals.

"For millions of older Americans, however, Social Security benefits still fall below the government's own poverty benchmark."

Nevertheless, the Nixon administration not only is fighting against more Social Security increases but has also recommended higher Medicare payments. This proposal would cost the aged and disabled \$1 billion more for Medicare next year.