

Most people would take the view that, despite the truly astonishing relationship between the upper and lower ends of the benefit schedule, the minimum benefit considered in the absolute provides a pathetically low income. Obviously, not even an ascetic could manage on the present \$44 per month, or even on the \$70 suggested by President Johnson. In fact, it is impossible to use the social security system to provide a suitable income for people at the lower end of the income spectrum unless we are willing to junk the entire underlying philosophy and transform the social security system into a particularly wasteful welfare mechanism.

Another point to consider is the fact that an unknown proportion of those receiving minimum benefits have not necessarily been low-income earners. For instance, there is the case of an astute lady who was anticipating retirement from administrative work in a public school system not at that time under social security. She persuaded her brother, who owned a large department store, to hire her to tie bows for gift wrapping, spending just enough time at the chore for the \$50 quarterly earnings requisite for coverage. As she pointed out, she certainly didn't need the income from bow tying, but it was silly to pass up the social security for which she could so easily qualify, and she accumulated quarters of credit just as assiduously as she accumulated growth stock.

Unfortunately, the Social Security Administration was unable to provide direct information on the percentage of minimum-level beneficiaries who fall into relatively high income categories. Table 8, which is based on the Social Security Administration's 1963 survey of the aged, provides some indirect information which suggests that married couples³ receiving the minimum level of benefits are not necessarily the most disadvantaged group. While only 45 percent of the beneficiaries in the \$40 primary insurance amount (PIA) category received retirement income other than their social security pension, the median value of this income lay at a higher point for the lowest PIA than for any other PIA category. In fact, retirement income other than OASDHI for the minimum PIA group was 20 percent larger than for either the highest PIA or the "normal"-low PIA, and double the value of the middle PIA category.

TABLE 8.—RETIREMENT INCOME AND SOURCE, BY PRIMARY INSURANCE AMOUNT, MARRIED COUPLES, 1962¹

	Primary insurance amount			
	\$40	\$41 to \$59	\$60 to \$99	\$100 and more
Retirement income other than OASDHI:				
Median amount.....	\$1,215	\$1,000	\$605	\$1,000
Percent with such income.....	45	54	67	87
Percent with retirement income from:				
Employer pensions, public and private, other than OASDHI.....	15	11	14	39
Veterans' pensions and compensations.....	15	21	14	16
Assets.....	32	39	57	77
Private annuities.....	3	2	3	6

¹ Does not include retired married women whose husbands are not entitled to OASDHI.

Source: Leonore A. Epstein and Janet H. Murray, "The Aged Population of the United States," Social Security Administration, Office of Research and Statistics, Research Report No. 19 (scheduled for publication July 1967), pp. 328-331.

³ While table 9 shows data for married couples only, similar relationships among PIA groups appear for nonmarried beneficiaries. However, the actual figures, particularly dollar amounts, differ considerably. Data for various categories of single beneficiaries may be found in the source cited for table 8.