

Ali talks L.A. man off ledge

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Muhammad Ali talked a distraught 21-year-old man from the ninth-floor fire escape of an office tower Monday, then drove the would-be jumper to a police station in his Rolls-Royce, police said.

"It's really you!" the man exclaimed when Ali, former heavyweight boxing champion, poked his head out a ninth-floor window next to the partially enclosed stairwell and called out to him to talk things over.

The man, whose name was not disclosed, climbed onto the fire escape in midafternoon and came close to jumping several times before Ali stepped out 2½ hours later and helped him to safety, police said.

An investigating officer said the man was "a very distraught, mixed-up young man" who "was talking Army jargon."

"It was like a Vietnam flashback. He said the Viet Cong were out there."

Ali, who lives in the nearby Hancock Park sector, was conducting business across the street and was told of the potential jumper by an aide who had seen the commotion and offered Ali's services to police.

Hagarty said the offer initially was rejected because "we don't want people getting in crisis situations and then asking for movie stars."

But "at 3 (p.m.) he said he was definitely going to jump and he came close too jumping."

"We decided to give Muhammad a chance at talking to the man."

'Absenteeism threatens economy'

EDMONTON (CP) — Labor and management must cooperate to combat the "epidemic of absenteeism" which is a far more serious threat to Canada's productivity than labor dispute, says a union official.

Ken Fraser, national coordinator of the employee recovery program of the Canadian Labor Congress, said Monday that in 1978, 7.3 million mandays were lost in labor disputes while 83 million mandays were lost to work absenteeism.

He said in an interview that absenteeism is costing Canadian businesses \$21 million a day or \$7.7 billion a year. In any given week, about eight per cent of Canada's work force stays away from work.

Fraser said surveys show 80 per cent of employee absenteeism is caused by the same 15 to 20 per cent of the work force.

The absenteeism is an employee faced with personal or work-related problems — anything ranging from emotional upsets, marital or family problems, alcoholism or drug abuse to job dissatisfaction, low morale, work fatigue or rigid work schedules, he said.

There also is "on-the-job absenteeism" — poor productivity, missed meetings and work deadlines, late arrivals and early departures, judgment errors and an increasing proneness to accidents.

"Absenteeism is a major economic as well as a social problem," Fraser said, adding that labor is as concerned as management.

The CLC adopted a policy in 1978 calling for management-labor employee recovery programs. For the last two years, Fraser and others in similar positions have been researching methods and procedures to help combat absenteeism.



Muhammad Ali talks to distressed man (left) and convinces him not to jump. At right, the former heavyweight champ embraces the man on balcony. Story left.

PRIVATE SECTOR MEETING

New pension ideas discussed

by JOAN COHEN
for Southam News

OTTAWA — Can Canada reform its ailing pension system without a massive showdown between government and the private sector?

Industry is opposed to a suggested reform measure laid out in a government pension study prepared last spring that could mean a doubling and more of Canada Pension Plan rates and benefits, and an enormous new flow of funds into the government's hands.

But business, and the rest of the private sector, was given a challenge last November from Health and Welfare Minister Monique Bégin: Come up with some ideas of your own.

The private sector — represented by some 300 business, labor and consumer groups — will have its chance to respond at the three-day National Pension Conference beginning March 31.

These groups aren't likely to speak with a single voice. But as inflation continues to batter the poor and chop away the nest eggs of everyone else, there's a new recognition that something must be done. The conference should provide some important clues as to what is workable — and saleable.

One man whose thoughts are likely to be reflected in more than one conference paper is Laurence E. Coward, one of Canada's top pension experts and a director of William M. Mercer Ltd., a leading employee benefits consulting firm. Among his credentials are a two-year stint as Ontario's pension commissioner and an appointment as pension adviser to the Australian government.

In an interview in Toronto, Coward argued strongly for a major increase in old-age security payments — possibly to double their present levels — as the most effective way of improving Canada's public pension system and of bringing relief to those most in need.

Canadian business, he said, is ready to make far-reaching improvements in its own pension offerings — full pension benefits for surviving spouses and indexing.

With these improvements, Coward said, the target proposed in the government's study paper — to maintain pre-retirement living standards of middle- and lower-income Canadians — would appear within reach.

Coward's arguments in sup-

port of increased old-age security payments largely echo the findings in the government study, which was prepared a year ago by finance department official Harry Lazar.

But the Lazar study suggested that any change in OAS levels should be left to the politicians. The study then turns to a discussion of possible improvements in contributory private schemes and the Canada Pension Plan.

Coward, on the other hand, insisted that Canada's basic pension program should be made to play a central role in providing income security for the old.

He noted, for example, that more than 50 per cent of Canadian pensioners today qualify for the means-tested guaranteed income supplement, one indication that there is something wrong with Canada's basic security program.

For single people today, the old-age security and

guaranteed income supplement are virtually at the same level, \$202 and \$204 a month respectively (the guaranteed income gives couples a combined total of \$312).

Coward said that by doubling the OAS payments, there would be no need for supplementary benefits, though this measure alone would not boost the single poor above the poverty line. It would reach people over 80, who don't qualify for any CPP benefits, and those in their 70s who get only partial help.

In contrast, Coward warned that a boost in CPP benefits would provide the greatest assistance to those who need it least.

The industry's attitude toward private pension plans has also undergone a massive shift.

He said Canadian business is now ready to accept a wide range of reforms in provincial pension laws — including the long-resisted indexing of pen-

sion benefits. What industry won't accept, he warned, are laws that leave it with unlimited liability in periods of runaway inflation.

Coward said that since the investment earnings of pension funds normally rises when the cost-of-living increases, companies could be required to pass along these gains in the form of indexed benefits covering "a good chunk" of price rises.

He felt industry would also support the Lazar's proposal for full indexing, which calls for the government to put money into pension funds when inflation is rising and investment earnings lag behind. (The government, in turn, would get a refund from the pension funds when inflation rates fall.)

Coward said his own surveys suggest that business is doing more than is generally recognized to improve its pension schemes and raise pension payments.

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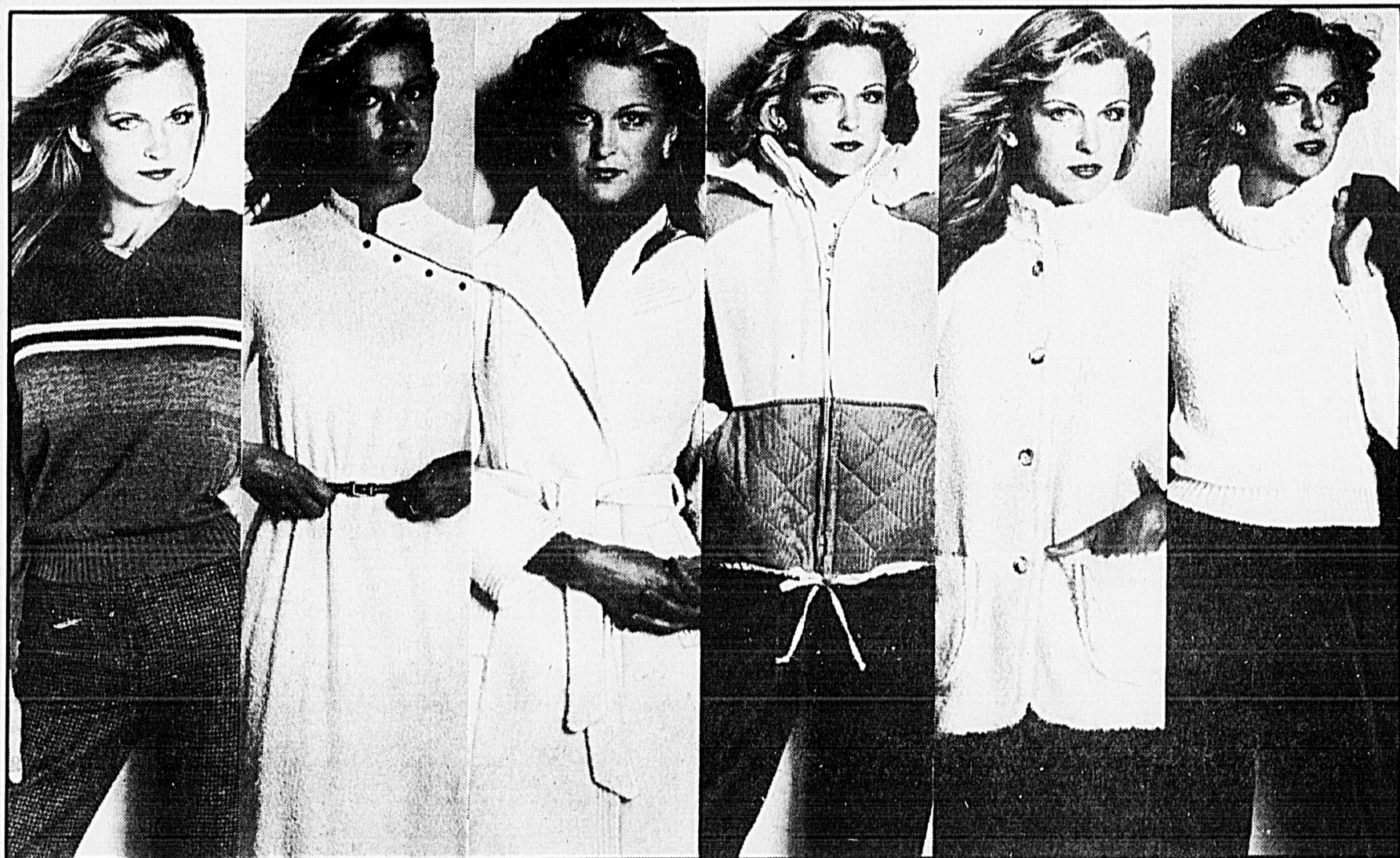
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HELD IN IRAN

Not coming home

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Free-lance writer Cynthia Dwyer, 49, has been sitting in an Iranian jail cell since May.

The mother of three won't be coming home with the 52 hostages seized in the 1979 capture of the U.S. Embassy, but her husband says an agreement for their release gives him new hope that she too will be home soon.

"It certainly doesn't make me pessimistic," John Dwyer said Monday. "It's just one of those situations where you just have to take it step by step and carefully, but I think possibly their release has brought a resolution to this crisis."

Dwyer, chairman of the English department at Buffalo State College, said he was "delighted — and I know I can speak for my wife" at the news that an agreement had been signed for the hostages' release.

He has not seen his wife since she left for Iran on April 10, planning to sell stories to Buffalo newspapers and other publications when she returned.

On May 5, Mrs. Dwyer was arrested at her hotel and accused of spying for the CIA, an accusation Dwyer denies.

State department officials say that securing the hostages' freedom will brighten the picture for other U.S. citizens held in Iran, if only because negotiators would be bargaining for a smaller group.