

Old Age Security

Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent); and with particular reference to the question of old age security I would direct attention to the statement he made a few months ago and which apparently has been overlooked in the discussions that have taken place in this house within the last few days. I think what the Prime Minister said last year in Vancouver deserves to be noted in the context of what I have to say today. He said:

One of our main domestic concerns is the provision of social security for all Canadians. The funds distributed under old age pensions, family allowances, pensions for the blind, health grants and other measures have also, in addition to the direct benefit received by the direct recipients of those amounts, added a strong upward influence in maintaining levels of employment. Our social security program is, as you know, by no means complete. We still have a good way to go before provision of social security in Canada reaches the level which will satisfy . . .

We are certainly not satisfied with our old age pension legislation, even though the scale of pensions is fifty per cent higher in dollars, than it was before the war. What has been our aim is a contributory system of old age pensions, one under which our old people will receive their pensions as a matter of right and without there being any means test.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Where was that statement made, may I ask?

Mr. Martin: In Vancouver.

Mr. Diefenbaker: On what date?

Mr. Martin: I have not the exact date at the moment. The Prime Minister went on:

By contributory pensions paid by the state I do not mean the kind of pension that any one of you could obtain by going to an insurance company and paying an annual premium. It is not a pension where there is going to be a separate account for every Canadian and where he will get as his pension only the return of his own contributions and interest thereon. What we mean by a contributory old age pension scheme is a scheme whereby all Canadians will contribute each year to a fund for old age pensions and where old age pensions will be paid out as a matter of right to those who will have attained the pensionable age—

Then he went on:

It will be a pension of an equal amount for everyone at pensionable age to which everyone of taxable age will make a direct contribution. But we cannot have a contributory system without an agreement with all provincial governments to have the constitution amended, as was done in the case of unemployment insurance . . .

In respect of old age pensions, and of all social insurance, the constitution of 1867 placed those matters under provincial jurisdiction, and as long as I am in parliament I will always oppose any attempt by the parliament of Canada to take from the legislatures of the provinces one iota of the jurisdiction given to them by the constitution, unless they agree to that being done.

If, and when, that is done, there will be the possibility of a contributory old age pension scheme which will be the same for Canadians in every province of Canada.

Then he continues with this second and concluding paragraph. I commend these words to the member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). It reads as follows:

These are matters which require, and which are receiving serious consideration. I here repeat the assurance that we will stand by the proposals we made to the provinces in 1945, although of course we are always ready to consider modifications, if changes can be made which are justified by the conditions of today or the conditions of tomorrow, and which would make agreement easier to reach.

Mr. Knowles: Is this still part of the Prime Minister's speech delivered in April, 1949?

Mr. Martin: I do not know what the date is, but this year.

Mr. Drew: No, not this year.

Mr. Martin: The leader of the opposition is right, it is last year. That is still the view of the Prime Minister and the members of this government.

Mr. Drew: I do not want to interrupt, but the statement which has just been attributed to the Prime Minister is of sufficient importance that we should have the date of that speech on the record, as well as the circumstances under which it was made.

Mr. Martin: I do not believe the circumstances would make much difference. My hon. friend is entitled to the date, and I shall get it for him. I believe the Prime Minister has now become known throughout this country as a man whose word can be relied upon, no matter what the circumstances.

Mr. Drew: That may be, but we have a right to know whether we can rely upon the repetition of it. We do not know the date.

Mr. Martin: I shall certainly see that my hon. friend gets the date before the end of the debate.

These words of the Prime Minister make abundantly clear the relationship between our attempts to achieve a better system of old age security for our people, and the consultations which are to take place later this year with the provinces. As we approach these discussions with the provinces, it will be helpful for us to have the considered views of all the parties in this house, of organized labour, of industry, of representative social welfare organizations, and of other interested groups in our population, who have given study through the years to the important question of old age security. I believe that in the formulation of a policy nothing could be more desirable, before we finally meet the provinces, than to take the organized labour groups of this country into our confidence through this committee, as well as the farmers and