

Old Age Security Act Amendment

government responsibility and that an all-party committee should not deal with it. If that is so, I am willing to let the government shoulder the responsibility. Let it tell the premiers of Quebec and the other provinces and all the people of Canada what its idea is about reforming the constitution so that we may avoid the kinds of difficulties that we have seen the Minister of National Health and Welfare getting into in the legislation he has before the house today. Ten years ago he might have got away with it; 15 years ago he would have got away with it. Even five or six or seven years ago he might have got away with it. But today we are in 1966, and he will have difficulties in a month or a week from now with Premier Johnson or with other premiers. We shall have those difficulties until the government and this house get down to reforming our constitution basically to fit modern times.

Some people may think that I am going out on a limb, but I feel very strongly about this matter. I believe that these facts must be brought to the minister's attention now. I foresee many difficulties for him and for other ministers who attempt to bring down similar legislation unless we get down to the difficult job before us. I know this and hon. members opposite know it too.

I do not expect miracles overnight. We must get the premiers of the various provinces and people from different parts of the country around the conference table. It will be a difficult job to get agreement as to the dialogue needed to reform our constitution. Because it will be a difficult job is no reason for delaying any longer. Every day wasted will be another day's delay in getting on with the job of improving federal-provincial relations, unifying this country and strengthening national unity.

I agree with many of the humanitarian social welfare notions of the minister. I think he is well intentioned, but the Canadian people are worried. It is very good to have legislation on the statute books but more and more people are becoming concerned about how to make that legislation work. I repeat for the fourth or fifth time that legislation such as this will not work until we get down to brass tacks and bring our constitution up to date. Every other minister who brings similar legislation before this house stands so warned.

● (9:50 p.m.)

Mr. Mackasey: May I ask the hon. gentleman a question? In view of the difficulty, which he has acknowledged, in arriving at agreement on amending the constitution, does

he maintain that we should postpone this legislation until such time as agreement can be reached? Is that what he is suggesting?

Mr. Grafftey: For two years now I have been pleading with this government to get a dialogue going in this country in preparation for the reform of our constitution. The difficulty which the minister will encounter in making this legislation applicable not only to Quebec but to other provinces across the country arises because the government has hastily embarked on these measures before devoting its attention to the basic reform of the constitution which is required.

I heard the hon. member make certain declarations both inside and outside the house the other day. I agree with many of his humanitarian aims. But if they do not work once they are embodied in legislation their practical value is questionable however praiseworthy they may be. I think it is high time we put on the brakes and found out where this country is going before legislation of this kind is placed before the House of Commons in future.

Mr. Mackasey: Am I to understand that the hon. member is proposing that we postpone this legislation and deny this \$30 a month to a million old age pensioners until the constitutional problem has been settled?

Mr. Grafftey: I think the hon. member is putting a question which confuses short-term political expediency with the long-term issue of national unity facing this country.

Mr. Mackasey: You have not answered my question.

Mr. Grafftey: I do not propose to answer a political and leading question from a back-bencher.

Mr. Chatterton: It appears that the regulations governing the Canada Assistance Plan have not yet been promulgated. I am satisfied that the Canada Assistance Plan has a bearing upon the government's present proposals. Would the minister consider it reasonable or possible for any province to enter into an agreement with the federal government with regard to the Canada Assistance Plan before the regulations have been promulgated?

Mr. MacEachen: No. That would not be an orderly way in which to proceed.

Mr. Chatterton: In that case may I ask the minister to advise many of the members on