

Pensions Act

As Mrs. Parnell has been granted an increase of \$10 per month in old age security pension, it has been necessary to reduce Mr. Parnell's old age assistance allowance by \$10 per month in order to keep within the income limits of \$1,980 per annum which is the total amount of allowable income set by federal government legislation. To date the federal government has not announced an increase in old age assistance allowances.

On the surface, I considered this to be a factual statement, except that it is passing the buck. The answer I received from the hon. lady is as follows. It bears the same date and it is addressed to me, dear—it reads—

An hon. Member: Dear what?

Mr. Howard: I do not want to mislead either the members of the house or the public, but when the hon. lady and I both sat on this side of the house in opposition, we got to know each other on more than a formal Mr. and Miss basis. Since hon. members are interested in this matter, may I say the letter is addressed in typewriting, "Dear Mr. Howard", and written over the top of that is "Frank". You can see for yourself, therefore, it is almost addressed, "To whom it may concern". The letter reads in part as follows:

Thank you for your letter of November 15, which was similar to a number we have been receiving regarding reductions on certain forms of provincial assistance to senior citizens consequent upon the recent \$10 increase in the old age security payments.

You note that the minister says she has received a number of similar complaints. This is not an isolated case.

As you probably gathered from recent statements I have made in the house on this subject, the government is deeply concerned. At the same time, there are limits as to how far we can go in attempting to persuade the provinces—

Note that, Mr. Speaker.

—in attempting to persuade the provinces to let the pensioners themselves have the extra \$10 they have been voted. It is a provincial matter and there is little we can do beyond expressing our concern and disappointment.

I, too, express my concern and disappointment, not only at the circumstances in which these people find themselves but at the answer I got from the minister. The minister's letter continues in a friendly tone and one which leads a person to believe that all is not dark and there are some bright spots on the horizon. I quote:

Please be assured, however, that I will personally continue to do everything I can to see that our older people are treated both generously and fairly by all,

Yours sincerely,

I am sure you do not want me to read the name underneath that.

An hon. Member: Read it.

[Mr. Howard.]

Mr. Howard: I have been asked, so I will say it is signed in typewritten form "Judy LaMarsh" and penned over that just plain "Judy".

An hon. Member: Just very attractive Judy.

Mr. Howard: I did not mean that; I meant just ordinary Judy. Notwithstanding this light hearted banter, the fact is that the minister saw fit to pass the buck to the province and say, "I am sorry, I cannot do anything about it." Then the province passed the buck back to the federal government and said, "It is too bad the federal government does not do something about it," and all these people who are recipients of the old age security program, at least in the province of British Columbia, if not in all the provinces, find they have \$10 less a month.

These people do not particularly care whose responsibility it is, and do not particularly care which minister thinks it is the responsibility of some other minister. What they are concerned about is that one government has decided to pinch \$10 out of their pockets, all because this government did not have the foresight and real concern for these people, to come a long time ago and ask parliament to endorse legislation such as that we have now before us.

While the minister may address her letters "Frank" and sign them "Judy" this does not help Mr. Parnell and Mrs. Parnell. The end result is that in effect they have had \$10 a month stolen from them in October and November.

Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and the house went into committee thereon, Mr. Lamoureux in the chair.

The Chairman: Order. It being five o'clock it is my duty to leave the chair in order that the house may proceed to private members' business pursuant to section 3 of standing order 15.

Mr. Howard: I thought the house had been agreeable to proceed and finish the bill.

Mr. Monteith: It is agreed to by this party, at any rate.

The Chairman: Is that agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

On clause 1—*Agreements with provinces.*

Mr. Howard: I thought the minister was on the point of rising to close the debate on second reading. Perhaps she would relate to the committee the names of the provinces who wanted these increases to come into effect later than December 1.