

*Inquiries of the Ministry*

**Mr. Winkler:** The old age pensioners suffer again.

**Mr. Johnston:** A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. If the official opposition and the government succeed in delaying this measure until the spring, will the legislation be retroactive to at least January 1?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The question as asked is hypothetical.

[Later:]

**Mr. M. W. Martin (Timmins):** My question is directed to the Minister of National Health and Welfare and is supplementary to one which was asked some time ago. I realize of course how fierce is the competition to catch your eye today, Mr. Speaker.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Martin (Timmins):** Having in mind the reluctance with which the hon. gentleman went along with the idea of the Minister of Finance to postpone medicare for a year, would he not reconsider the priorities and place the old age pension problem ahead of medicare.

**Mr. MacEachen:** We on this side of the house are anxious to get ahead with the income provisions for the recipients of old age security benefits and we hope, as the Prime Minister said on Thursday, that the resolution will be on the order paper this week. We hope to get on to the actual passing of the legislation as quickly as possible, though I would express the wish that the house might conclude the debate on medicare before we deal with the pension bill.

**Mr. T. C. Douglas (Burnaby-Coquitlam):** May I ask a supplementary question? What date has the minister in mind for making the new pension payments effective?

**Mr. McIlraith:** Order.

**Mr. Speaker:** I doubt whether the question asked now by the hon. gentleman is in order.

**Mr. Douglas:** I am not asking the question frivolously. If the date is to be, say, January 1, we shall know what time we have at our disposal. We should like the minister to tell us when these payments are likely to become effective. This would guide the House of Commons in assessing the order of priorities it should follow.

[Mr. MacEachen.]

**Right Hon. L. B. Pearson (Prime Minister):** I realize this is an important question but, as the hon. gentleman must know, we cannot very well establish our order of priorities or estimate when we are likely to reach a particular item of legislation when we have no idea when we will be granted supply, which is the first item on the time-table.

There are the amendments to the National Housing Act. That is an important piece of legislation. We are dealing, now, with medicare; the bill is in committee stage and we would like to get the committee stage completed, with any amendments which might be required at that stage, before going on to consider the pension plan.

**Mr. Douglas:** I agree with the Prime Minister's suggestion that it is important to get on with medicare. But it would help the house if we knew the date on which the old age pension legislation was likely to become effective. Is January 1 likely to be the date upon which it will be effective and payable to the old people?

**Mr. Pearson:** We want it to become effective at as early a date as possible, and if interim supply gets through reasonably quickly, and the National Housing Act amendments get through quickly, and the amendments, if any, to the medicare legislation get through, we shall be able to start on the pension bill, perhaps next week. That is all I can say.

**Mr. Douglas:** Are payments likely to be retroactive to September 1?

**Mr. Pearson:** I cannot answer that question. The resolution will be on the order paper within a day or two. I made that commitment, and it will be carried out.

**Mr. Winkler:** A supplementary question to the Prime Minister—and I appreciate the amount of information he is giving us. He knows I appreciate the fact that he is committed to going forward with this legislation. Inasmuch as the medicare legislation has been placed back to the extent it has in the order of business before the house, would not the right hon. gentleman commit himself to introducing the old age pension legislation, so that we could go forward with this measure immediately? This I suggest would have a bearing on the current debate and enable an answer to be given to the question asked by the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam regarding the effective date.