

*Old Age Security*

of co-operation can be obtained that would not be possible if the provinces were simply brought together without any concrete legislation before them for consideration.

Later in the same session, on April 15, 1926, as recorded at page 2487 of *Hansard*, Mr. King said:

In reference to the answers from the nine provinces, which the hon. gentleman has just read, I might say that those very replies convinced the government of the futility of ever having an old age pension scheme enacted by correspondence with the provinces. We concluded that the best way would be to enact concrete legislation. We thought that was the only way we could get anywhere.

I submit, Mr. Speaker, that if the government of 1926 had listened to the objections of the provinces, had listened to the ruling of the Department of Justice, had listened to the protest of the official opposition, that act would not have been passed that year, and who knows whether we would have had the beginnings of old age pensions on the statute books yet. But no, the government of the day—under pressure, to be sure—felt that it was necessary to act, not just to consult, nor just to hold conferences, not just to study, and so they put the act on the statute books. Well, that act, as most hon. members know, was defeated in the other place. The hon. gentlemen over there seemed to agree with the idea of pensions for themselves, but they voted down the first old age pension act. To complete the record I must say that it was the Conservative majority over there that killed the first old age pension bill. What did the then prime minister do? He made it an issue in the election campaign of that year, and said that if he came back to power he would put that act back on the statute books. In the next session it was put on the statute books, and the leader of the Conservative party at that time got up in the House of Commons and said that they were in favour of the measure.

I submit, Mr. Speaker, that what happened in that case was that the government went over the objections of the provinces, the objection of the Department of Justice, the objection of the official opposition, to the highest court in this land, to the people themselves. The people said they wanted that legislation, and when the next parliament met the legislation was put on the statute books.

I submit that is the way the government should be acting now, not finding all possible ways and means to stall; rather, legislation should be brought in at this very session.

I have criticized the minister for not pinning himself or the government down to anything concrete. I would have to criticize the hon. member for Eglinton on the same score. He says that what this house wants is not a committee, but resolute action, and he stated

the general position of his party as being one in favour of a national contributory old age pension plan. But I did not hear him tell the minister what he thought should be put into legislative form and brought before parliament at this session. Since I have criticized both of the previous speakers for that shortcoming, I must try and state clearly and without evasion what I think should be done; I must and will state the view of the party I represent on this matter.

In what I am about to say, I am going to have to use a word that I wish to define a little more fully. I refer to the word "contributory". But, bearing in mind the fact that I am going to define it, may I say that we believe in and advocate an over-all social security system on a contributory basis. But let it be clear that we support the contributory idea only in relation to an over-all plan. Anything piecemeal would have to be non-contributory. By "over-all" we mean a social security system which includes old age and retirement pensions, unemployment insurance, health insurance, sickness benefits, pensions for invalids, family allowances—everything that is necessary to provide real social security in the modern sense.

That is what we advocate. It is set out clearly in the platform we have circulated throughout the country, and it is toward that end this party is working. We recognize that a program of that extent will have to be attained by a few stages. Having admitted that, the next thing for me to do is to state clearly what I think the first stage should be. That is what I wanted the minister to do this afternoon; and I am sorry also that my hon. friend to my right failed to do it.

What do we say should be the first stage? As I said on Monday in another debate, we say—and I repeat it now—that the first thing to do is to get rid of the means test. I believe there is real significance in the way public sentiment has welled up against the means test the past few years. No one would now stand up and defend it. The idea of saying to people who have saved a little, who have got their own homes together, who have paid taxes and helped contribute to the wealth of the country, that, whereas others in destitute circumstances can qualify, those people cannot qualify for the old age pension—that just does not make sense at all. I insist that these thousands of cards which are coming to this building these days represent a very sound opinion; and I hope that even the hon. member for Winnipeg South (Mr. Mutch) will credit the people who are sending them in with holding very honest convictions that the time has come to do away with the means test.