

Old Age Pensions

Laurent) or from the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Martin) some information that might give some hint as to whether or not anything is coming this session. But every question we ask is met with the stock reply that government policy will be announced in due course. Sometimes the Minister of National Health and Welfare, genial soul that he is, simply says to me, "If my answer last week was not helpful, I cannot be more helpful this week." It adds up to nothing in all cases.

Mr. Martin: Better word your questions differently.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Speaker, I have lain awake nights trying to think of different ways in which to ask my old age pension questions, in the hope that the minister would give a proper answer. I have adopted the practice at times of giving him notice of my questions in the hope that he would do the generous thing; and I have tried asking him questions without warning, but the answers are always non-committal.

Mr. Cruickshank: Will the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Knowles: Certainly.

Mr. Cruickshank: Did not the dominion government offer an increase which was obstructed and refused by the provinces of Ontario and Quebec at the time of the dominion-provincial conference?

Mr. Knowles: It is perfectly true that an offer to increase the amount paid by the federal government by making it one hundred per cent federal from age seventy up, plus a shared basis from sixty-five to sixty-nine, was made at the dominion-provincial conference of 1945 and 1946, and that the stand of two premiers forestalled—

Mr. Cruickshank: May I ask a further question?

An hon. Member: Wait until he finishes.

Mr. Cruickshank: I am in accord with what he says. I am asking him a question. Would the hon. member tell us who were the premiers of Ontario and Quebec at that time?

Mr. Knowles: When we ask a question like that the government replies, "Surely the hon. member must know." However I shall be more helpful and answer by saying, in case the hon. member does not know, that the premier of Quebec at that time was the Hon. Maurice Duplessis and the premier of Ontario at that time was the Hon. George Drew.

Mr. Ross (Souris): Who was the Prime Minister of Canada?

Mr. Graydon: And the government refused to reconvene the conference. That is the answer to it.

Mr. Drew: And still do.

Mr. Knowles: May I say that in my view those who scuttled the conference of 1945 and 1946 have a great responsibility on their shoulders. But so has the government a responsibility for using the scuttling of that conference, whoever did it, as an excuse for doing nothing in the years which have come and gone since then.

Mr. Graydon: The government scuttled the conference; do not blame us.

Mr. Knowles: For the purposes of what I am now saying, that does not matter. The scuttling of the conference has been used and is still being used as an excuse for doing nothing. Meantime the cost of living has gone up; meantime the plight of the old age pensioner has got worse.

Not only is there no sign of any improvement for the old age pensioners in any of the ways I have indicated, but it so happens that neither is there any private member's motion on the order paper calling specifically for an amendment of the Old Age Pensions Act, as it now stands. Apparently hon. members expected action by the government. There are several motions on the order paper somewhat different from that, in that they ask for something I have advanced, namely an over-all contributory plan of social insurance. But in the meantime even those of us who are advancing that realize that the old age pensioners on pension today must not be asked to wait until we have a perfect statute, and to starve in the meantime.

The one thing that can be done now is for this government to bring into the House of Commons an amendment to the present Old Age Pensions Act increasing the amount, lowering the eligible age and doing away with the means test.

Mr. Graydon: Call a conference.

Mr. Knowles: The plea I am making today is for an amendment to the act. Before this session goes any further I ask that the government tell the house what it is prepared to lay before us, and let us vote on it. Let us vote on a bill amending the Old Age Pensions Act, a bill doing those three things—increasing the amount, lowering the eligible age and removing the means test. I need not argue those three points. The need for at least \$50 a month is self-evident. Further, I believe the Minister of National Health and