

Old Age Security Act Amendment

deducted from their increase in the old age security pension they will be very unhappy. Therefore I think the minister should assure us that this will not be the case.

Mr. MacEachen: We will do our best.

Mr. Graffey: I do not intend to be very long, Mr. Chairman.

[*Translation*]

I just want to point out once again to the minister that the time has surely come for the Canadian government to consider what I call a true reform of our constitution, particularly after the remarks made by the premier of Quebec. In my opinion, there is no doubt that it is a joint responsibility under the British North America Act and we can rest assured that the field of old age pensions is certainly a responsibility that we share with the provinces.

I will only repeat what I said in the house a few days ago. I feel that the time has come for the federal government to undertake a real study of our Canadian constitution.

• (9:40 p.m.)

[*English*]

I said at the outset that I would be brief and I intend to be brief. By pretending that difficulties do not exist in this regard the federal government is plunging its head into the sand.

This government came to power a few short years ago and time and time again in the province of Quebec and in other provinces it has had great difficulties because of unilaterally entering into fields that obviously were in the realm of conjoint jurisdiction. I say to the government that the premier of Quebec is being very reasonable. He is voicing a moderate opinion. If Mr. Lesage were premier he would voice the same point of view but perhaps not in such a moderate way. When the government unilaterally entered into fields of conjoint jurisdiction when the Liberals were in power in Quebec it found time and again that it was faced with profound difficulties. I say, let us not exacerbate the situation. I will not take a position at the present time. Some might say I am sitting on the fence.

I will not take the position of saying that the provinces ought to bring forth a better act in the field of old age pensions than the federal act. Surely the federal government and the minister know that by acting as they have in these circumstances they are exacerbating the problem of federal-provincial relations. Before the Minister of National Health and

[*Mr. Fane.*]

Welfare or any other minister unilaterally acts in the future as this minister is acting, one basic thing will have to be got under way. I will not reiterate my idea that this measure ought to be a centennial priority. It is my hope that certain things will take place during centennial year to unite our country, that we may get on with the basic job we have to do. We should do those things before any minister of the Crown introduces further legislation that will have an effect, through unilateral action, on conjoint jurisdiction.

The basic job facing this government and this parliament is to get down to the task immediately of attempting to get a made in Canada constitution suited to modern times. Backbenchers on the government side have said to me time and time again that there is not enough unity in this country to start getting on with this job. I say there is enough unity to get on with the job of constitutional reform. Until we get constitutional reform ministers such as the Minister of National Health and Welfare will not be able to introduce the kind of legislation he has introduced lately without getting into unseemly and unnecessary difficulties. We need in this country a modern constitution suited to modern times, a made in Canada constitution that will make the minister's job easier.

I predict that there will be unnecessary difficulties and federal-provincial friction which could have been avoided had the government taken the initiative in calling an all-party committee to Ottawa to study the constitution and to enter into a dialogue with Quebec and the other provinces. Perhaps that dialogue ought to take place before the conference to study the constitution is convened.

Perhaps we shall find that the British North America Act is flexible enough to meet current needs or that we need only small amendments or that we need amendments to a greater extent. Perhaps we shall need a whole new constitution. We need to get down to the job. I am sure my hon. friend opposite from Quebec agrees with me. Until we get down to this basic task each minister of the crown who unilaterally plunges into a field such as we are concerned with here will meet with the difficulties the Minister of National Health and Welfare has encountered in any program he has undertaken.

Let us get on with the job, Mr. Chairman. Many government backbenchers have told me that they do not think the country is unified enough for us to get on with the basic job of reforming the constitution. Some say it is a