

Pensions Act

Mr. Howard: I must thank my parliamentary secretary, the Secretary of State, for helping me out in this particular instance.

To proceed, let me express appreciation to the house for this courtesy shown, not only to me but, what is more important, to the recipients of allowances and pensions, because they are the people we are concerned with when considering this particular item.

When the minister spoke, her introductory remarks contained a reference to the dominion-provincial conference, and to the effect that not one province was in favour of extending these particular payments retroactively beyond December 1. This, in my opinion, is a shame and a disgrace to the various provinces if they, in fact, took that adamant attitude. The minister has said that some provinces indicated they were desirous of having this measure made effective at an even later date. This, in my opinion, is even more disgraceful. If and when the minister closes the debate, or at some other stage in the proceedings, I believe she should relate to the house and to the general public just which provinces wanted this measure to become effective at an even later time than is proposed. This would enable the people to know which provinces took this attitude.

The minister said, too, that this was the reason the date of December 1, 1963 was picked as the retroactive date for this bill to come into effect. It seems to me that if the various provinces were so mean and niggardly in their attitude toward this measure that they adamantly refused at the dominion-provincial conference to have it come into effect at any date prior to December 1, then the minister should have taken up the challenge, as she is wont to do, and made the measure effective on the same date as the old age security pension. This would have put the provinces on the spot. She could have said to them, "We are being magnanimous and we are going to pay these people what they should have. Will you not go along with us?"

What I expect happened is that this is the attitude of this government, that this government does not want the measure to come into effect before December 1. It wants to save a few pennies for the months of October and November, instead of being reasonable, just and fair to the recipients of these particular payments. I believe the minister said that the cost involved would be somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$1 million a month for the three types of pension that are before us at the moment. I do not know if she actually used the phrase "a million dollars", but this is what I have computed it would cost. The October and November

payments would, therefore, only involve an additional \$2 million and would be payments to those people who really need them more than anybody else. I know the Liberal party is embarrassed because of the attitude taken by the late C. D. Howe, but do they have to be that embarrassed by the statement, "What's a million?" Why do they not say, "What's a million or two million? Let us pay these people for the months they justly deserve and not take a penny-pinching attitude towards people who are really in need".

If the government wants a couple of million dollars, I would remind them that the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Hellyer) was tossing millions around the other day. Apparently he was able to save \$75 million in a few minutes of slashing of his estimates. A little more time spent in slashing the estimates of the useless Department of National Defence would give us another \$75 million for the people who really need it. After all, we paid millions and millions of dollars for these useless, senseless Bomarcs which we are going to return to somebody in a month or two. Why can we not take the money from this project and use it for people who really need it, the elderly, the blind and the disabled. This, in essence, is what I wanted to say in respect of the general principle, Mr. Speaker; but I should like, if I may, to make a reference or two to some correspondence which I have concerning particular cases. I raised this matter in the house at one stage by way of a question to the minister, but I did not get an answer, so perhaps I should make a reference to it now.

I refer to one instance only, but there are many, in which the provincial department of social welfare of the province of British Columbia curtailed the amount of old age assistance payable to an individual because, and I quote the reason from the form sent to the individual, "old age security to spouse increased from \$65 to \$75 per month." In effect, what happened—and this happened to many recipients of old age assistance—is that this parliament increased old age pension payments by \$10 a month, but the department of social welfare in British Columbia eliminated the increase by reducing the old age assistance payments. We raised this question with the minister. I sent her copies of the particular form, and I sent a letter and also copies of the form to Mr. Wesley Black, minister of social welfare in British Columbia. I asked them to do something about this particular item. I should like to quote the replies which I received, each one of them dated the same day, November 19. The reply I received from Mr. Black in Victoria regarding this matter was as follows, and it refers to an individual case: