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May 9th, 1935.

Memorandum reviewing developments in connection with pensions for the blind in Canada.

Read at Conference of Representatives of Public Bodies of Vancouver - May 10th, 1935.

The matter of pensions for the blind in the Dominion of Canada has been actively pursued for many years, particularly since 1926 when the Old Age Pensions Act became effective in several Provinces. Perhaps the most important development in this connection was made in 1931 when the two National organizations concerned with blind welfare, viz; the Canadian Federation of the Blind and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, set up a Joint Pensions Committee. As a result of this committee's work a Memorial was prepared and signed by every organization of and for the blind in Canada. This Memorial was presented to the Government at Ottawa by officials of the two National organizations in October, 1933. It was subsequently considered at the Provincial Premiers' Conference at Ottawa when, almost without exception, it was indicated that the Premiers and representatives from the various provinces were in favor of enabling legislation being enacted. At a later date Premier Bennett, when speaking in the House, stated that he would favor pensions for the blind whenever the country showed sufficient evidence of recovery to justify such legislation.

On January 31st, 1935, Dr. I. D. Cotnam, M. P. for North Renfrew, introduced a resolution which, in effect, requested that the Old Age Pensions Act be amended so as to apply to blind people, otherwise eligible, at the earlier age of 40. During the debate which followed, and as reported in Hansard, the principle of pensions for the blind met with phenomenal approval from all sides of the House. Following a motion of Mr. Gordon, Minister of Labour, the matter was referred to the Standing Committee on Industrial and International Relations. This Committee first met on February 21st when representations were made by both National organizations of the blind.

Another meeting of the Committee was held on March 1st, when further information was given by the two national bodies, as well as by various individuals. It is obvious from the copies of Hansard of these dates that the members of the Committee were very sympathetic.

On April 3rd, the Committee brought in a recommendation endorsing Dr. Cotnam's resolution. Some discussion followed during which certain members expressed the opinion that a separate or special Act would be more satisfactory. Sir George Perley, Acting Prime Minister, asked that matter be held over and the subject was again introduced on April 11th and 12th and following some discussion Dr. Cotnam moved an amendment to his former resolution. The matter was again referred to the Committee on Industrial and International Relations and as the House

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