

Old Age Pensions

It is difficult to give a comparable figure for Ontario, because of the extra means test which is attached to the \$10 which is paid in some cases by the government of Ontario; but in the cases, few though they may be, in which the full \$10 is paid, it works out that the federal government is paying only 56 per cent of the total amount received.

This picture is at variance with the whole trend in the matter of old age pensions in this country. When the act was first brought in by a Liberal government back in the middle twenties the provision was that 50 per cent was to be paid by the provinces and 50 per cent by the dominion. In the election of 1930 Mr. Bennett promised that if returned to power he would arrange for the pension to be paid 100 per cent by the federal government. When the Conservatives came into power they implemented that promise half way; they brought the federal contribution up to 75 per cent. I remind hon. members opposite, however, that when the Conservatives were implementing that promise only half way, the Liberals berated them and insisted that they implement their promise all the way and make it 100 per cent.

During the years that have passed since then, the view has been expressed by all parties, and by interested groups throughout the country, that it is toward 100 per cent contribution by the federal government that we should be moving. I feel therefore that this retreat to the percentages I have indicated is bad in theoretical terms, and is particularly bad in its effect on the old age pensioners themselves.

What has happened as a result of this inequality and uncertainty amongst the provinces is that you have not only these varying maximum rates of old age pensions throughout the country, but you have provinces holding back, refusing to make the additional grants that they are asked to make, because they feel that the federal government should at least stick to the 75-25 ratio. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I feel that most, if not all, the provinces are quite justified in their insistence that this responsibility should be borne in full at the federal level.

I have read with interest the reports of debates which have taken place on these matters in various provincial legislatures, and I note that always the provincial government spokesmen point to the fact that the responsibility should be borne here. When the Minister of Justice (Mr. Garson) was premier of Manitoba, every time the issue came up there he would express sympathy with the old age pensioners of Manitoba, but would say that primary responsibility for any adequate old age pension must rest with the federal government which alone

[Mr. Knowles.]

has the necessary financial resources. The result of this, Mr. Speaker, is that the old age pensioners themselves are denied the fuller amount of pension that they should have. They are asked to wait month in and month out, year in and year out, for an adequate pension. We all know what happens in the meantime. Many senior citizens of this country who dare to hope that their country will do the right thing for them pass away before an adequate pension is made available to them.

The soundness of the arguments that some of us put up when this matter was before the house two years ago has been amply demonstrated. We do not get adequate old age pensions by this government paying only a portion of it and tossing the ball to the provinces, leaving it to them to bring the amount up to an adequate level. What happens is that the provinces toss the ball back to the federal government, and the old age pensioners are left with an inadequate amount.

My particular grievance, which prompts me to rise at this time, the first occasion of a supply motion, is that despite the game of football which has been played in connection with this matter, despite the obvious need which every hon. member recognizes, there is as yet no sign of anything being done about it at this session of parliament. I have scanned everything that there is to scan. There is nothing in the speech from the throne which might indicate that there is anything coming for our old age pensioners. There is nothing in the budget which makes for any amelioration of the plight of these old people; and frankly, Mr. Speaker, some of us are very much annoyed that it is possible to make these huge savings in terms of millions and hundreds of millions of dollars, and do something for a great host of people in this country—yes; as the budget did—but do nothing at all for this large group of senior citizens who surely deserve our consideration.

There is nothing in the estimates that gives any hope that anything will be done to improve the lot of our old age pensioners. The very slight increase that is there is obviously due to the increased number who will qualify this year. I have not had a chance to look at the supplementary estimates which were tabled a few moments ago, but I am quite sure that if there had been anything in these supplementary estimates to solve this problem, an announcement would have been made about it with no little fanfare.

I might say as well that a number of us in this group, and in other groups, have tried to get from the Prime Minister (Mr. St.