

Inquiries of the Ministry

when I was in Europe two or three weeks ago. So far as I am aware there has been no change in the situation. The local agents of the department in Hong Kong were instructed to institute legal proceedings to arrest the ships. The ships however have remained in Canton on the assertion of the owners that the crews refused to sail them under these circumstances. The owners of the ships were informed that in view of the attitude which had been taken the ships could no longer be permitted to operate under the Canadian flag. The matter stands there. We are unable to arrest them in Canton. So far as our information goes, they have not moved from Canton in the meantime. The question of Canadian registry is linked with the validity of the mortgages. There are some legal questions involved there, and I do not know that I would care to elaborate on those this morning without further informing myself as to what the situation is.

Mr. Drew: May I point out that the legal aspect of this matter rests upon a very frail foundation while these ships are in the harbour of Canton. I would suggest it is perfectly obvious that any recognition of a legal obligation will be one which will be enforced by other authorities than our own under these circumstances. I think the dignity of Canada, as well as respect for the Canadian flag, both demand that an order in council be passed immediately rescinding the special order in council which gave them the unusual right to fly the Canadian flag although there were no Canadians manning these ships.

Mr. Graydon: We should not have been in this in the first place.

OLD AGE SECURITY

RETROACTIVE PAYMENTS

On the orders of the day:

Mr. G. K. Fraser (Peterborough West): Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of National Health and Welfare answer the question I asked him yesterday?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Yesterday my hon. friend asked me: If an application for old age pension is sent in on or before January 1, 1952, but the applicant has not been able to secure proof of age before the end of January or February, will the old age pension date back to January, 1952? The answer is yes. My reason for giving that affirmative reply is based on the act itself. The reason I did not make the reply yesterday was that the section of the act which gives this authority is purely permissive in

effect, and as I had anticipated tabling today the regulations pursuant to the Old Age Security Act I preferred to wait until they were tabled. I can now add that pursuant to those regulations, where applicants have difficulty in establishing their age and delay results therefrom, this will be regarded as a delay arising out of circumstances beyond the control of the applicant, and payment in such cases where the application form has been received in December will be made retroactive to January 1.

CHINACANADIAN MISSIONARIES—POLICY AS TO
REPATRIATION

On the orders of the day:

Hon. L. B. Pearson (Secretary of State for External Affairs): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to answer the question asked by the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Browne) on Thursday last dealing with the number of Canadian missionaries still remaining in China and whether the government had any special policy with regard to their repatriation.

The records of the Department of External Affairs show that the total number of Canadians in China is 201, and of these 162 are missionaries and their dependents. On a number of occasions toward the end of the civil war in China, and after the communists achieved power, the Canadian government notified all Canadian citizens in China known to the Canadian representatives that in view of the situation in that country they should leave as soon as possible. Many of them have done so, as the figures I have just given would indicate. Others have not been able to or, from the highest motives of service to the Chinese people themselves, have not desired to.

The established policy of the Canadian government is to repatriate, if necessary at public expense, any Canadians in distress abroad. With regard to those Canadian citizens who are still in China, the Canadian government takes as generous as possible a view administratively as to what constitutes destitution or distress among missionaries in China. In such cases the government is always ready, upon request by a church order or society, to do everything it can to assist the repatriation from China of any of its missionary members. On receipt of this assistance, the order or society is asked to give the usual undertaking for repayment.

It is becoming increasingly clear that Canadian missionaries and others have been subjected and are still exposed to mistreatment and injustice by the authorities of the Chinese