

*Old Age Security*

The minister pointed out that it would be a case of cutting across the whole theory of responsible government, that you could not have policies made, particularly where they involved the expenditure of money, by committees representing all parties. The minister said that policies have to be brought before the house by the government which is responsible to parliament and in turn responsible to the people. The minister went into the matter at some length. He is an expert on this question because at one time he wrote an article in a magazine in which he took the other side of the question. Having changed his mind, and he has stated that change of mind several times on the floor of the house, he opposed the committee idea again on November 3 and November 18, 1949, when the leader of the opposition (Mr. Drew) was asking for a committee on defence.

That is the position the government takes. I agree that we have responsible government. At times we have tried to get into the heads of the ministers what that means. We had quite a battle with the Minister of Justice (Mr. Garson) last fall as to what responsibility on the part of the government meant. But at the moment I am talking of this in relation to committees of this house. Committees can make studies; committees can bring out information and disseminate it among members of parliament and in turn throughout the country; but they are not vehicles for getting action. The only way to get action is for the government, which is responsible to parliament and in turn to the people, to bring its policies before this House of Commons in the form of legislation.

I regret very much that the Minister of National Health and Welfare has today done the very thing that the Minister of National Defence on October 12, 1949, said should not be done, for he failed to state the government's views on the matter and simply said that the whole question will be referred to a committee.

I should like to indicate the nature of the minister's speech. He put a number of opinions on the record and by asking rhetorical questions, the answers to which were supposed to be obvious, he hinted at his own opinions on one or two points. He quoted the speech of the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) in Vancouver on April 14, 1949. He commented on the situation with respect to the plans in the United States. He lined up four different plans which might be assessed by the committee. As a result of all these words that were uttered, I have no doubt that the newspaper reports will give the people of Canada the impression that something is coming out of this committee. But the minister on behalf of the government did not

pinpoint any one of those propositions and say, "We are going to bring in legislation to implement this policy or this point of view." The whole matter has been left to the committee, which in turn has no legislative power. As the Minister of National Defence said last fall, "What is the use of having a committee unless it can make recommendations, and what is the use of a committee making recommendations if they have to be approved, first of all, by the government?"

I submit that it was the responsibility of the minister today not just to give us this interesting discourse on the subject of old age security but rather to tell us what the government intends to do by way of legislation at this session.

**Mr. Ferrie:** What about Ontario and Quebec?

**Mr. Knowles:** The hon. member for Mackenzie is again making references to the provinces and perhaps I might as well deal with that right now. I was going to deal with that later, but it is just as well to do it at this time because the Minister of National Health and Welfare said that he hoped that we could get rid of the means test but it depended upon making necessary arrangements with the provinces. If I heard him correctly there was a somewhat similar reference in the quotation he gave from the speech of the Prime Minister in Vancouver last April.

May I remind the government and the hon. member for Mackenzie that that sort of argument figured largely in the discussions back in the middle twenties when old age pensions were being considered in this House of Commons. At that time there were the same objections raised to old age pensions that are being voiced today against a better old age pension. One of them was the constitutional argument and another was that you had to consult the provinces. Another was the financial problem. Another one was the supposedly high moral consideration that the hon. member for Winnipeg South (Mr. Mutch) is now advocating, namely, that we have to consider whether this kind of thing is good for the people as a whole.

**Mr. Blackmore:** Anything for an excuse.

**Mr. Knowles:** As I say, back in the middle twenties one of these committees, I think it was the committee of 1925, collected reports from the various provinces as to their attitude toward instituting old age pensions at all. In addition they got an opinion from the Department of Justice, and I want my hon. friend, the hon. member for Mackenzie (Mr. Ferrie) and the Minister of National Health and Welfare—I assume the minister is fully aware of this—to realize that the opinions of the