

Old Age Security

syllable the minister uttered this afternoon shows clearly how anxious the government is to keep the brakes on this committee, to prevent it from making any independent recommendations that might offend the dictates of government policy.

My fourth observation on the shortcomings of this proposal is that it is a recommendation for the appointment of a special committee. If there is need for a committee—and there is—then it ought to be a standing committee of the house, not a mushroom committee that will be permitted to sit while it serves the purpose of the government, and then will be eliminated when it has served the government's purpose.

Mr. Pearkes: Like the veterans affairs committee.

Mr. Fleming: The same thing again. The government will have a special committee when it tends to suit the government's purpose, but the moment the committee shows any independence, or ceases to knuckle down to government orders, or tries to meet the needs of the veterans, then of course the government steps in and says it will have neither a standing committee nor a special committee in that field. The same thing is true here, Mr. Speaker. If there is any merit in the arguments the minister has submitted to the house this afternoon for the appointment of a committee, the merit lies in the appointment of a standing committee, not a mushroom committee.

At the last session of parliament the government had the opportunity to accept my proposal for the appointment of a standing committee of the house in the fields of health, welfare, social security and housing. That resolution was debated in this house on October 12, 1949. It was defeated on a called division by the government voting against it, after the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Claxton), then acting minister of the department which the Minister of National Health and Welfare heads, had vigorously opposed it as being the sort of thing that he said would run counter to proper parliamentary practice and responsible government.

I do not say that the minister is wrong today in recommending a committee. The trouble with him is that he does not recommend a proper or adequate committee. The minister who was speaking for him last October 12 was utterly wrong in his condemnation of the establishment of a standing committee of the house in these important fields.

It is worth remembering, sir, that when the then acting minister of national health and welfare was commenting on the scope and

purposes of such a committee he had this to say concerning recommendations, which will be found at page 725 of *Hansard* of October 12:

In the first place a committee considering policy, administration, appropriations and expenditures would be useless unless it made recommendations to the house.

On the reasoning of that minister this committee, which is not being given power to make recommendations, is accordingly doomed to be useless. I do not know how many hon. members will wish to approach a committee task like this with a feeling that their efforts are doomed to futility before they start.

The next observation I make is that if the purpose of the government, when they conceived this committee, was to fly a kite and obtain whatever information they wanted as to the views of various political parties, or other organizations interested in the field, or the people of Canada, they have had ample opportunity to obtain those views. There has been ample discussion on this question in the house in recent debates to show the minister and the government where the political parties stand on this question. It goes back to this, sir, that what is needed now is action, and resolute action. While there is ample ground for the appointment of a standing committee in this field, the government does not give us any assurance of action.

What is the real reason for this recommendation now, this proposal from the government, which in effect runs counter to and in the teeth of the case sought to be made out by the Minister of National Defence, speaking in the debate that I have referred to, namely, on October 12, 1949?

It is a well-known fact, Mr. Speaker, that the government is under pressure on the subject of old age pensions. Members of parliament are under pressure on the subject of old age pensions. The public is aroused to the inadequacies of the present pension scheme, and to the intolerability of the continuation of the means test, as it has not been aroused thereto before.

Undoubtedly supporters of the government in this house, in the light of promises that so many of them made so readily during the election campaign last spring, are under very great pressure to fulfil their promises. Therefore the government has obviously found it necessary to steer a course now that is somehow going to relieve the pressure. I submit to you, sir, that is precisely what we have before us now. The pressure, sir, has unquestionably doubled ever since the government showed its position very firmly on September 19, 1949, with reference to the means test. There was