

*Old Age Pensions*

Mr. McQUARRIE: I remember a few evenings ago the Minister of Railways when asked about his province stated that it would be very wrong for any legislature to bring in such a bill before parliament enacted this legislation. I understand from the minister that the government anticipates this bill will be adopted by all the provinces. The minister nods his head in approval. If that is so, it is quite clear that the government expects to pay 50 per cent of the cost of old age pensions, and if we pass this bill we admit our responsibility to that extent, which will mean about \$12,000,000 annually. It may be that all the provinces will not come into the scheme, in which event the Dominion government will be contributing to some of the provinces towards old age pensions while to others it will not pay anything. Now, while I am entirely in favour of the Dominion assuming the whole responsibility,—

Mr. ARTHURS: Hear, hear.

Mr. McQUARRIE:—that is, paying 100 per cent, as suggested by my hon. leader. I feel that in any event we should live up to our responsibilities and in this bill, instead of stipulating for the making of agreements with the provinces, we should provide for the payment of 50 per cent. I regret very much that the minister has intimated that he will not consider any amendments to the present bill. I think the minister himself admits that the bill is not perfect.

Mr. HEENAN: That is right.

Mr. McQUARRIE: Well, how can it be improved if he will not accept suggestions, even from his own supporters? As I say, I am in favour of the Dominion government paying 100 per cent of the cost of the old age pensions; but if that is not done, let us provide in this bill for the payment of 50 per cent to all the provinces so that the old people throughout the country will at least receive ten dollars a month.

Mr. McGIBBON: Mr. Chairman, I wish to say, as I have said before, that I am in favour of the principle of paying proper old age pensions. I wish to say also that I am not in favour of this bill, I never was and I do not ever expect to be, as long as it remains in its present form, for the following reasons: In the first place, I claim that in this or any other country those who are responsible for collecting the revenue are responsible for spending it; in the second place, I claim that we have no right to pass on obligations to the provinces without consulting them; in the third place, I say we have no right to enact legislation which we know beforehand, and

[Mr. Heenan.]

which it is quite evident on the face of it, is going to be a great disappointment to the people of Canada. There is no question about that. Under this bill some old people will get nothing unless their province comes into the scheme—that is inevitable; others possibly may get \$20 a month, which of itself is insufficient. Then there will be that great disparity all the way from twenty to nothing, or from nothing to twenty. This is bound to create dissatisfaction and animosity between people living in the same province.

I think, Sir, we are to-day paying dearly for the lack of foresight on the part of this government in not calling the provincial premiers together and agreeing on some scheme before introducing this bill. It is quite evident to any man who reads the newspapers that the provinces are holding back, and will continue to hold back, leaving the full responsibility on this parliament and the country generally. In view of the Solicitor General's statement a while ago that this proposal is not being forced on the provinces, I would ask the minister how he is going to apply sections 10, 11 and 12. This defect in the bill of itself will put unequal obligations on the provinces. I think the bill has been ill conceived and ill drafted, and if it goes into effect its application will be unfair.

I would say to the minister that as he has passed through an election, and probably there is not another in sight for three or four years, this bill should be withdrawn in order that it may be reconsidered and redrafted, and that in the meantime he should get in touch with the provincial premiers with a view to coming to some common agreement whereby this parliament and the provincial legislatures could pass legislation which at least would be workable. I look upon this measure, Sir, with considerable anxiety. The old people of this country are undoubtedly looking to this parliament for redress, and I am just as certain as I am standing here that they are going to be bitterly disappointed in practically every aspect of this bill. It is essential that an old age pensions scheme should be uniformly workable in every province. Under this measure you will have some people getting nothing while others are getting five, ten and fifteen dollars per month. That condition of affairs prevailing from the Atlantic to the Pacific is bound to stir up dissatisfaction with this legislation. I am in favour of proper legislation, but this is both ill considered and badly drafted. How will the minister make sections 10, 11 and 12 applicable in view of the Solicitor General's statement a few minutes ago?