

*Old Age Pensions*

the clause of the report which my hon. friend read, but let me direct his attention to the wording of it:

That the federal government arrange with the premiers of the different provinces for a conference to be held during the coming recess of parliament at which an old age pension system shall be given the fullest consideration with a view to securing co-operative action, and that the report of the said conference be laid on the table at the next session of parliament for future consideration and action.

Mr. BENNETT: "Future consideration and action".

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Yes, but the report says, "at which an old age pension system shall be given the fullest consideration, with a view to securing co-operative action—". I venture to say that it will be necessary, before this scheme is worked out in an effective manner, to have a conference of the premiers or other representatives of the different provinces, to consider how the provinces can most effectively work in under the plan that is here proposed, but the thing that will help bring about co-operative action is having something concrete to lay before them.

Mr. BENNETT: The report has it the other way. "That the report of the said conference be laid on the table at the next session of parliament for future consideration and action".

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I am quite prepared to admit that that had reference to a conference. If a conference had been called last summer that action would have been taken, but as my hon. friend knows it was impossible to have a conference last summer, which makes the laying of a report on the table impossible at the present time. It does not, however, make impossible the preparation by this government of a carefully drafted method of assisting the provinces in an old age pension scheme, and then, when that plan is adopted, an invitation to the provinces to meet with members of the federal government to consider regulations for the carrying out of the plan. That procedure does not in any way preclude the conference; indeed, it will help bring about the conference in an effective way. It practically suggests that a step of that kind will be taken and ought to be taken.

In regard to legislation of this kind which necessarily is in part a matter of provincial legislation, I agree with my hon. friend that so far as the federal government is concerned our duty is largely that of assisting such of the provinces as are willing to undertake such a

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

scheme as is proposed. If that is true, I think it follows that it is very desirable to have, so far as it is possible to have it, uniformity among the different provinces in any scheme adopted. An unfortunate feature which arises from the division between the provinces on matters relating to industry is that there are so many different standards in the different provinces. One of the greatest needs in the industrial life of Canada to-day is that the standards governing industrial relations should be more or less identical as between one province and another. That can only be brought about by some kind of action on the part of the federal government leading to co-operation between the federal government and the provinces and among the different provinces themselves. I submit that this scheme of old age pensions as here drafted will have that effect. It will be the natural thing to ask the representatives of the provincial governments to meet with the department of the federal government which may be administering the old age pensions plan, to discuss further its details, and to consider the regulations for its effective operation.

I did not really mean to take any part in the discussion this evening, but I felt that I would like to follow my hon. friend in one or two points which he developed. I hope I have shown him that they are factors which the government did not fail to take into account and did not overlook, but that so far as the purpose of the immediate legislation is concerned, it looks to providing a pension for men and women of the generation that is passing away, or will have passed away in the course of a very few years. That is primarily what we are considering at this moment, and in considering men and women of that category we will, I think, be taking the first necessary step to bring about that larger measure of contributory social insurance which is one of the great needs of our time.

Mr. STEVENS: Would the right hon. gentleman permit a question, or rather two questions in one?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Certainly.

Mr. STEVENS: Does it not follow that before this legislation can be made applicable the provinces will have to pass legislation? Secondly, will not such legislation to be passed by the provinces have to conform, generally speaking, to the provisions of this federal act?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Yes.