

Old Age Security

bring about that co-operation with the provinces which the government itself admits will be easily obtained, and to inaugurate a national contributory old age pension plan.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, during the eight years I have been in this house, I have listened to a great many fine speeches. In fact, a number of those speeches have been the sort that could lead one to believe that a new heaven and a new earth was just around the corner. I think of the speeches that were made by the prime minister during the war years, when we were told that the government was planning then for a better world after the war. I think of the speech made by the minister of reconstruction and supply (Mr. Howe), as he then was, in April, 1945, in which he outlined the government's post-war employment policies. I think of the speeches we have had from time to time about housing. I think of the important speech delivered by the former prime minister in May of 1948, with respect to health matters. I think now of the speeches we have heard before, and the speech we heard today from the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Martin) about old age security. All of them have been fine speeches, phrased in such a way that press reports could give the country the impression something wonderful would happen very soon. We are still waiting for that new world; we are still waiting for the implementation of those employment proposals; we are still waiting for adequate housing; we are still waiting for health insurance; and we are still waiting for adequate old age pensions in this country. Having listened closely to the speech of the minister and having thought about it since he made it, my candid opinion is that it is in the same category with the others. It was nice to listen to; he gave some interesting quotations to which I shall refer; but it does not envisage any early action on this problem of old age security.

I think the minister started off on the wrong foot. In the first few minutes of his speech, I take it in an attempt to give the impression that it was a good idea to set up a committee on old age pensions and that action would follow, he said, if I heard him correctly, that there have been committees on old age pensions on two other occasions, one in 1908 and the other in 1924. The minister said that immediately following the committee in 1908 something happened, the old age annuities act was brought in, and he said that the committee of 1924 led to the introduction of the Old Age Pensions Act in 1926 and its enactment in 1927. I assume the minister knows that those were not the only two committees on old age pensions.

[Mr. Fleming.]

Mr. Martin: Two others.

Mr. Knowles: There was a motion for one made in 1907 which was withdrawn. There was the committee of 1908; there were committees in 1912, 1913, 1921, 1924 and 1925. The minister told us about only two committees. As for claiming that the committee of 1908 had anything to do with the inauguration of government annuities, I should like to read this paragraph about that committee, taken from a later report. It reads:

On the 10th February, 1908, a select committee of nine was appointed. The chairman had made arrangements with Messrs. Blue, Acland and King for certain information to be supplied to the committee. Professor Adam Shortt and two other eminent sociologists had been communicated with who were expected to give valuable evidence, but after three sittings had been held it was found impossible, owing to morning sessions of the house having begun, to reconvene the committee. No report was presented to the house, other than a verbal statement made by the chairman on the 10th of July, ten days before the Old Age Annuities Act, 1908, was assented to by the Governor General.

A report was made on July 10, and second reading of the bill—I remember this very well because it was the day I was born—was on June 18, 1908. The point is that that committee was not responsible for the annuities act. The reason I mention that is to deflate, and I feel a job of deflation should be done, the inference made by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Martin) that the setting up of committees produces results. We have had a great many more committees than the two he mentioned and it has taken a long time and a great many committees to bring results of any kind.

In addition to the committees I have mentioned there was a committee on social security in 1943 and a committee on reconstruction and rehabilitation which went into these matters as well in 1944. I submit that the record is not very good so far as this parliament is concerned as to the effectiveness of committees on social security. They pile up a lot of information that can be used for debate on the floor of the house and I should admit that they help to educate our people in the whole field of social security, but they are not vehicles for bringing about action.

In connection with the setting up of committees, I think it should be emphasized, as it was by the previous speaker, that when committees are asked for from this side of the house to go into various matters the government spokesmen take an opposite attitude. On October 12, 1949, when a motion was made by the hon. member for Eglinton (Mr. Fleming) for the setting up of a standing committee on social security, housing and related matters, the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Claxton) opposed it vigorously.