

from day to day, throughout the year, I hear much in the way of criticism of the present system, both of its shortcomings from the point of view of social service and also of the abuses which are alleged in all provinces to have crept into the administration of it.

An hon. MEMBER: All provinces?

Mr. DUNNING: I believe all provinces, yes. There have come from all provinces, in some cases in greater volume than in others, allegations of abuse of the principle of the old age pension system. Neither the shortcomings nor the abuses, however, should deter this parliament from considering forward steps in connection with social legislation of such importance. The hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Heaps) on this occasion has framed his resolution much more cleverly, if I may say so, than formerly. He has framed it in such a way that it is very difficult for any member of the house to express dissent from the object sought. But I wish to analyse it for a few moments.

Leaving aside the preamble, which does not very much matter except as an introduction to the resolution itself, the motion reads:

Therefore, be it resolved,—that this house would welcome a government declaration of policy that would bring about an immediate lowering of the present pensionable age limit of seventy years, the effect of such being that the older generation would retire from industrial activity, thereby creating opportunities for the younger generation to be usefully and gainfully employed.

Why not a resolution that this house would welcome a government declaration of policy that would bring about a sufficiency of rain in the western prairies? My hon. friend treats the subject, and not quite innocently, as if a government declaration of policy in this house could effectuate the object which his resolution seeks. That is not the case—yes, there is one form of government declaration of policy in this house which might bring it about; and I am speaking now to the trustees of the Canadian people when I put it to them. There is one form of declaration which might effect the result, and that is for this government, representing this parliament, to express the willingness of the national parliament of Canada as a whole to take over all of the additional cost which would be represented by lowering the pensionable age from seventy to some other point—the resolution does not determine the point, but the mover says sixty-five and some others say sixty. It is possible that the provinces of Canada would agree, provided the government of the dominion agreed to assume all of the cost represented by the lowering of the pensionable age to whatever point might be decided upon.

[Mr. Dunning.]

In so far as the present old age pension scheme is concerned, I do not think there is much chance of getting all of the nine provinces to agree to bear their share of what would be represented by the additional cost to both dominion and provinces of making the change which is advocated. We sometimes lose sight of the fact that when this dominion parliament decided that we should have a dominion-wide old age pension scheme, we could only decide to do that provided the provinces in the exercise of their exclusive constitutional authority with respect to the matter would enter into partnership with us. And they did—slowly. The last province of the nine came in only about two years ago; Quebec came in in 1936, I think. We are in no position to force old age pensions upon any province in Canada. We are in the position of contributing as the national entity towards something which is constitutionally a provincial responsibility.

I sometimes question the wisdom in the long run of these extra-constitutional financial arrangements between the dominion on the one hand and the provinces on the other. The old age pension scheme has been an excellent illustration, throughout the years of its operation, of the difficulties which are inherent in the system of evading our constitution by means of agreements between the dominion on the one hand and each one of the nine provinces separately on the other. We agreed first upon what might be called the skeleton of the scheme. In order to qualify for the assistance offered by the dominion a province engaged to enact a certain type of old age pension legislation to fit into the general national scheme. I wonder whether the house realizes how difficult it is in those circumstances to secure reasonable uniformity in administration from one end of Canada to the other; how particularly difficult it is, after having secured agreement upon the initial legislation which the provinces shall enact, and when as a result of experience it becomes clear that amendments are necessary, to get each one of the nine provinces to agree upon the nature and scope of those necessary amendments; and how impossible it is to work a dominion-provincial agreement if one province or one group of provinces is legislating along a different line from the other eight, or two from the other seven, or three from the other six.

During the two years since this government came into office, I have had the experience of endeavouring to deal with this problem, concluding with a conference of the nine provinces last fall in an endeavour—I think a sincere endeavour on the part of all—to accomplish two things; to remove, on the