

*Old Age Security Act Amendment*

been introduced in the house. It seems that Mr. Crestohl was at that time a member of the Liberal party and one can find his speech which, I think, is very much to the point, in the English version of the Debates of November 26, 1951, on page 1319. I quote:

I should like now to make one or two observations with respect to the application of the act in practice. The theory of paying a pension universally to rich and poor alike carries with it a dignity commensurate with our desire to preserve for our senior citizens the self-respect to which they are entitled by age alone, if by nothing else. It eliminates the stigma, in my judgment, of relief or charity and clothes it with the stature of a reward well deserved and well earned for many years of service.

That is the spirit that was prevailing when the Old Age Security Act was introduced in 1951.

Precisely, at that time, the government made the old age pension universal in character.

Anyhow, every citizen has an equal right not only to the old age pension, but also to the medicare and hospital insurance.

How is it that the present government has, for instance, in the case of the medicare bill, stressed, besides three other conditions—compulsoriness, state control and portability—the universal character of the plan. How is it that, during the same session, the present government insists on universality in the field of medicare, which is a social measure, precisely on the principle that every citizen has an equal right to it, while in the field of old age pension, which is another social measure, it discriminates and denies that all citizens have an equal right to universality?

I say that the present government once again, and in many other fields, contradicts itself and is inconsistent in the philosophy of the legislation it introduces, and that is the criticism I have to make concerning the bill before us.

Thus, the industrious and rich citizen will pay taxes all his life, contributing generously to the old age security fund. On the other hand, the lazy, spendthrift and improvident citizen, after a whole life of public assistance and laziness perhaps, will benefit fully once again of the act before us today. In many cases, the present government encourages and will be encouraging social vice by this bill; laziness and lack of foresight will be dealt with exactly the same as the virtues of foresight, industry and thrift of the citizen who worked all his life.

[Mr. Allard.]

I also want to say, in the second part of my remarks, that the present bill encroaches on provincial rights. In 1951, a constitutional amendment authorized Ottawa, with the authorization of provinces, to legislate on old age pension. Section 94A, which is very eloquent and explicit, reads as follows:

It is hereby declared that the Parliament of Canada may from time to time make laws in relation to old age pensions in Canada, but no law made by the parliament of Canada in relation to old age pensions shall affect the operation of any law present or future of a provincial legislature in relation to old age pensions.

Mr. Speaker, why did the provinces agree then to a constitutional amendment? Because, according to the text of the 1951 amendment, they were keeping, absolutely, completely, totally, their responsibility in the field of old age pensions. There is no clearer text in the Canadian constitution.

● (4:30 p.m.)

Indeed, that can readily be appreciated for, in 1867, according to the letter and the spirit of our constitution, the exclusive authority in all local, regional, civil, professional, family and social matters was conferred upon the provincial legislatures. And the 1951 amendment respects the letter and the spirit of the requirement imposed by the provinces at that time, to allow Ottawa to legislate that safeguard for the future. Well, that shows that old age social security comes first under the jurisdiction of the provinces or of any province which today or in the future decides to look after it.

That amendment did nothing but ratify the initiative taken by the central government in 1927 about old age pensions, an initiative rejected first by Quebec on constitutional grounds but accepted by that province in 1936 and at the federal-provincial conference held in December 1950. I have already mentioned in the house on other occasions the increasing progress of the federal government on the road to centralization in fields which do not come under its jurisdiction, particularly that of social security. And in times of war and economic recession it became the major holder by far in the field of taxation in Canada, and to spend that money it interfered in provincial fields of jurisdiction.

The province of Quebec refused in 1927, and until 1936 it waged that constitutional fight which is reaching a peak today. Those were not useless fights because, as a matter of fact, we have come today to a decisive turn in the history of Canada, to an important