

in the country as a whole would be for the government to take action to see that these old age pensioners have at least a decent standard of living. After all, what are we fighting for, if it is not for the establishment of such a principle? We must convince our people that we are really sincere when we say that when the war is over they will have a decent place in which to live. Our country is at least worth fighting for. I want to join heartily in everything that has been said in this regard.

Mr. NEILL: I wish briefly to endorse what has been said by the hon. members who have spoken in favour of increasing old age pensions. This illustrates the unfortunate political system under which we work. The British North America Act puts the responsibility for old age pensions solely on the provinces. In 1925 and 1926 we realized the impossibility of the provinces carrying a burden of this character, and we devised what we thought was a wise system, a sort of joint scheme under which the dominion contribute so much and the provinces the same. Unfortunately that involved an agreement with each province, and it also gave the opportunity to both the dominion and the provinces to shirk their share of the responsibility as time went on.

If the minister speaks he will probably say that the dominion government would not be justified in increasing these pensions because a few of the provinces are now paying less than the \$20 allowed. If the pensions were increased it might mean that the dominion would be paying the full amount of the increase. That argument sounds plausible, but it is not so much so when it is considered that in some of the provinces the cost of living is lower, and also they take into consideration what assistance is given by relatives. A special committee dealt with this matter in 1925 and 1926. Witnesses were called and we asked them the same question—"When should old age pensions begin, and what should be the minimum?" We had a railway man as a witness on one occasion, and I think he put it very well when he said, "I hardly care to answer that question; it does not affect us because we have our own pension scheme; I say, get it started, no matter how low it is, because we know it will never get any less; the age limit will go down and the amount will go up—popular sentiment will encourage it." Those of us who favoured the scheme consented to the limit being placed as low as it was because we believed that in time it would be increased. If there ever was a

time when it should be increased it is now, when the cost of living has risen so considerably.

The dominion government under Mr. Bennett raised the proportion paid by the dominion from 50 per cent to 75 per cent. I hardly think he was justified in doing so; in my opinion that made the situation worse. If there is any increase the dominion government will have to pay 75 per cent of it, although that should not necessarily be so. This question was given careful consideration in British Columbia, and the province decided to apply to the dominion. The dominion replied that nothing could be done unless the unanimous consent of all the provinces was received. The province realized that that might be difficult to obtain. It was suggested that perhaps individual deals could be made, that British Columbia might be willing and Nova Scotia could be left out if they were not willing; but there was objection to that. Pressure was exerted upon the provincial government, and finally that government, in an effort to meet the increased cost of living which these older people have no possible hope of meeting, decided that pending legislation by the dominion—because the initiative must be taken by the dominion—they would give an additional \$5 a month, ostensibly as a cost-of-living bonus. That has been done, I do not know whether the same thing has been done in Alberta, but I think it has.

This \$5 a month in British Columbia is paid on the express understanding that it is a temporary device to meet the situation. It was anticipated that the dominion might come forward with a different proposal and that each province would agree. I would not object if the dominion agreed to grant another \$5 on condition that the provinces pay a larger share. I do not think it would hurt them to do that, because, after all, this matter comes under their jurisdiction. If the minister speaks I know he will use the argument: How can we compel Prince Edward Island to pay more than \$20 a month when she is willing now to pay only something like \$11? That is one of the obstacles we have under this system of two jurisdictions. We would have been much better off if the dominion government had assumed the whole responsibility. It would have saved trouble, and we would not have had the present dual organization and dual control. It increases the expense and does not increase the benefits.

This government should take the lead. Consideration should also be given to reducing the age limit. I am afraid I must put the responsibility upon the dominion government, because it is up to them to take