

Disabled Persons Act

Mr. Pearson:—by personal abuse in this house instead of meeting the arguments advanced, and instead of telling us what they are going to do to help the country in these difficult times.

The contributory pension scheme which we have put forward has been explained in detail in this house during the last few days, but the explanations did not make much impression on the Prime Minister.

Mr. Starr: Or on the country.

Mr. Pearson: The record will stand and it will be shown. It is very easy to show that this is a good scheme of contributory insurance and that it will do more for the pensioners in this country, in an equitable way, than anything being put forward by the government. When this proposal was put forward on January 5, 1962, it was designed by contributions to establish a minimum pension level of \$75. Then the government came along afterwards. We know now why they altered the speech from the throne at the last minute. It was because of the introduction of our plan that they started juggling with their own.

They introduced their own proposal for a contributory plan and, also a \$10 increase which raised the basic minimum from \$55 to \$65. In parentheses I may say that our proposal for contributory insurance in so far as its application to existing pensions is concerned was based on the basic minimum of \$55. When that was increased by government action, or a government proposal to parliament, to the \$65 level, had we been irresponsible on this side we could have added our \$20 to the \$65 and increased the minimum to \$85.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Pearson: I can imagine what the laughing cavaliers on the other side—and I am using a very polite word when I say “cavaliers”—would have said had we increased the minimum from \$75 to \$85. We stuck to the minimum of \$75, but because the original minimum was increased from \$55 to \$65, it meant that we would be able to increase that minimum at an earlier date than we expected. That is the course of common sense and responsibility, and to describe this plan as a hoax is an indication of the mentality of the hon. gentleman who applies that description to it.

Now I shall tell you about a proposal which, indeed, is a hoax. It is the proposal contained in the speech from the throne that this government in 1962, on the eve of an election—if they ever get around to calling it—

Mr. Diefenbaker: You are frightened.

Mr. Chevrier: You were going to call it two months ago. What happened to you?

Mr. Pearson: If the hon. members opposite are not, in fact, frightened about the possibility of an election, why does the Prime Minister not call an election?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: The proof that they are frightened is the fact that they do not do anything but talk about an election. In 1957-58 members of this government, which in 1962 has put forward a proposal for a contributory insurance scheme, went from coast to coast telling the people of Canada that they were going to do this as soon as they were elected. They were going to do it at once. They said they had looked into it. They said it was the thing to do, to keep the basic pension and add a contributory scheme to it. The Minister of Finance had a great deal to say about it, but did they tell the people of Canada at that time, “we will do it if we can get a constitutional amendment”? No, they did not. They started talking about a constitutional amendment only in the last two or three months. On the eve of an election, confronted with the necessity of doing something on paper at least, they put a couple of sentences into the speech from the throne saying “we will do this for the people of Canada if we can get a constitutional amendment.”

I tell the Prime Minister that at any time during the last four years, on the basis of the investigations they themselves undertook, they could have drafted the legislation required for this change. They could have gone to the provinces, as they are doing now. They could have taken the matter up with them. They could have found out what could be done by the federal government and what could be done only by way of a constitutional amendment. Did they do any of these things? Not at all. They waited until 1962 and used the constitutional device to get off the hook, to get out of that dilemma which the Prime Minister is always talking about.

Mr. Churchill: This bothers you a bit.

Mr. Pearson: Then, having put forward the proposal in the speech from the throne, they have only now got around to discussing the technical difficulties. This afternoon the Prime Minister had the effrontery to put forward as the excuse for this delay the desire of the government to bring about the amendment of the constitution inside Canada. He said if that had been accomplished they could have a constitutional amendment without going to the United Kingdom, and that was the only reason the contributory scheme had not been brought into effect. Of all the ridiculous, nonsensical excuses for inaction that is the greatest.