

Old Age Security

not enough, then it is utterly impossible for any person to look hopefully for any action whatever from this inactive and reluctant government.

What is their position? I have suggested it is difficult to find the government's position. We do know that their policy is to appoint a parliamentary committee, and apparently that is all the policy they now have in this field of old age pensions. Yet, I recall that the Minister of National Health and Welfare made this statement in a speech in Kitchener on March 27, 1949, as recorded in a Canadian Press dispatch:

The Liberal government program is now directed toward giving the national contributory old age pensions and a national health program.

Well, how about it? How about some action, Mr. Speaker? Let us have less talk and more action on the part of the government towards bringing about that promised national contributory old age pension system. If the government meant business when the minister made that statement in March, 1949, why all the obstacles that the minister plastered on the record during his speech today?

Then, of course, there is a speech made by the Prime Minister. The Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Martin) has not indicated to us as yet just when it was that the Prime Minister made that speech in Vancouver, but it may have been on that tour the Prime Minister took through the west during the Easter adjournment last year. At that time, he put his toes in to feel how warm or how cold the election water might be. While the Prime Minister was on the same tour, he made a speech in Edmonton which was not read today by the Minister of National Health and Welfare, but which is recorded in a reliable newspaper, the *Toronto Telegram*. The press report was written by a highly respected member of the press gallery, who accompanied the Prime Minister on that tour. The article reads as follows:

"Most people do feel that a basic pension of \$30 a month isn't worth, in purchasing power at the present, what the pension was worth before the last increase," he said.

The basic pension policy of the government is directed towards a contributory system without a means test, he added, but that end can't be achieved until some way is found to assess the contributions. He foresaw no difficulty in getting an amendment to the British North America Act to permit the setting up of a national system of contributory old age pensions.

Let me just interject: If he saw no difficulty in getting that amendment, why on earth was it not obtained long before this, to bring about a national contributory old age pension system?

Then the article continues:

The more attractive the present pension becomes, however, the greater difficulty of preparing the public mind for acceptance of the contributory plan, Mr. St. Laurent said.

To delay increases in old age pensions until a contributory system is worked out might be unfair to present pensioners and to those about to qualify for them, Mr. St. Laurent added.

To pay pensions under the present plan without a means test would take another \$200 million a year from the federal treasury, something not practicable if the people want reduced taxes. The inauguration of a contributory system depended not so much on parliament as on public opinion.

A national contributory system of old age pensions and social services generally would make all Canadians equal, said Mr. St. Laurent. A Canadian might move about from one province to another without having to consider whether he would gain more in these benefits than he would lose. As national unemployment insurance, made possible by the consent of the provinces, had increased the mobility of Canada's labour force, so would a national social security system make Canadians freer generally.

I am convinced that the Prime Minister was right in saying that there would be no difficulty in securing whatever was required, either in the way of provincial co-operation or by means of an amendment to the British North America Act, to make the inauguration of a national contributory pension plan possible. Other government officials are on record on this subject. The minister of welfare in the province of Ontario, the Hon. W. A. Goodfellow, said in September of 1948 that he urged the immediate establishment of a nation-wide contributory system of old age pensions. He gave detailed reasons why that system would remedy the serious difficulties that exist under the present system.

Before I leave this subject, I have one final quotation from a speech made by the Prime Minister in Ottawa on December 16, 1948, which reads as follows:

The Liberal aim is a contributory scheme in which everyone can pay in something during his working years to help provide security for his old age.

Now, sir, if that is the policy and program of this government, then I say to this government and to the house, there is no excuse whatever that will justify continued delay and inaction on the part of the government. No more information is required; no more delay is justified. What is required at this time, having regard to the needs of the people of Canada, and what is demanded by the members of this house who are alive to the needs of the people, what will be required of this government having regard to the promises made by it and many of its followers who were elected in June, 1949, is action—immediate and resolute action, to