

War Appropriation

five, we would give consideration to that. But only a few provinces have made any such request.

The dominion is in this position, that we cannot get a good old age pension system in this country without a dominion-provincial conference and getting the pension on a contributory basis. I never heard of a system where the means test was abolished if the system was not a contributory one. I do not believe the people of this country would stand for our paying forty or fifty dollars a month to millionaires over sixty-five or seventy years of age unless they had done something to pay for that pension; in other words, unless it had been contributory. If you abolish the means test, you must have the contributory system. Otherwise it will strike the ordinary taxpayer or member of parliament, no matter how generous he is with the taxpayers' funds, as ridiculous.

Mr. KNOWLES: I appreciate the difficulties to which the minister has referred in connection with dealings between the federal government and the provinces. I know, for example, the difficulty that we have in my own province of Manitoba in persuading the provincial government there to take certain desirable steps that are long overdue. One that I will mention particularly is this. About a year ago the federal government, after we had asked some questions about the matter, advised the provinces that as from that date they could cease filing liens against the property of old age pensioners up to the value of \$2,000. The change which the federal government made at that time was to make permissive rather than mandatory the filing of liens up to that figure. Since that time some of the provinces have taken advantage of that provision which the federal government made. In my own province strenuous efforts have been made by public bodies and by members of the legislature to persuade the provincial government to make that very minor change, but they have not seen fit to do so. I quote that in part to express regret that this has not been done and in part to support what the minister has said, that there are these problems in dealing with the provinces.

However, in connection with the statement that the responsibility for increasing the amount should be put on the provinces, I want not only to take strong exception to the minister's stand but to point out that the total amount of money which it would cost to take care of the present old age pensions entirely from the federal treasury is not very large compared with some other sums which

are now being provided. Like the minister, I have no figures in front of me, but my recollection is that it is about thirty-eight to forty million dollars a year that it costs the federal government, and about twelve million dollars is borne by the provinces; I may be out a few millions, but that is fairly close.

Mr. ILSLEY: It is a little high. I think the federal contribution is slightly over thirty million dollars.

Mr. KNOWLES: So much the worse, but it is in that region. In other words, the total cost of old age pensions to the federal government, the provincial governments and the municipalities—for in some provinces a portion of the obligation is passed on down—is in the region of fifty to fifty-five million dollars a year.

I wish to make a comparison, and in doing so I would make it clear that we of this group supported the family allowance measure which is to come into effect very soon. But if it is possible for us to find \$200 million a year for that desirable provision, only fifty or fifty-five millions a year to assist those at the other end of life is not good enough. My colleague the hon. member for Cape Breton South who is sitting beside me frequently says, when we are dealing with these matters, that there are two groups of people for whom social legislation should make the first provision—the aged and the young. I am glad that the step has been taken with respect to the family allowance measure, even though it requires certain improvements. But I feel that progress should be made in connection with old age pensions without delay.

I mention the family allowance measure for another reason. When the government brought that measure in they did not suggest that it should be the responsibility of the provinces; they felt that the effort to assist children and family life in this country should be put on a national basis, that it should not be possible to have differences as between the various provinces. Accordingly I would say that, commendable as it is that a number of the provinces have made additions to the amount which the federal government is paying, one of the undesirable features which is developing at the present time is the variations in the old age benefits in the various parts of the country. I think it would contribute a great deal to the sense of national unity in this country if old age pensions were put on a dominion-wide national basis similar to that of the family allowance measure, and in doing so let us make the best possible provision for our old people throughout this dominion. I