

Old Age Security

so. But in order to expedite the completion of the undertaking at the earliest possible date it is our intention that he should concern himself principally with the facts relating to the United States program, and with that in mind we have set out his commission of inquiry in the following terms:

To make an inquiry into the facts relating to the old age security systems presently in effect in Canada and the United States of America with particular reference to those features of the old age and survivors insurance program in the United States of America, which make it possible for higher benefits to be paid covering a wider range of contingencies at an earlier age than is provided under present legislation, and to report thereon as soon as may be possible.

Hon. Paul Martin (Essex East): Mr. Speaker, one would think the Prime Minister had indulged today in very extraordinary generosity in affording at least two of us on this side of the house the opportunity to ask him a question.

I am sure the house is most interested in the very important announcement he has made with regard to the government's intention to investigate the old age security and survivors program in the United States which, as he noted, the all-party committee of 1950 carefully examined. May I ask the Prime Minister if, in view of the fact that the United States government contributes nothing whatsoever to the program in that country, contributions being paid entirely by employers and employees, it will be the intention of the government to follow the same practice and not make any contribution to that kind of scheme?

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend apparently misapprehends the nature of my remarks. We are going to have the plan examined, and on the basis of that examination will determine what changes will be necessary in order to make it applicable to Canada.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Sinclair: Window dressing.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of this group may I say that we welcome the announcement the Prime Minister has made today, which is by way of further elaboration of the statement he made on November 19 when he spoke in the debate on an amendment to the motion to go into committee of supply which it had been my privilege to move from this corner of the house. He knows from press reports the position already taken by this party along the same lines, and I may say that if the government or any group in the house proposes a plan whereby there will be contributory old age insurance over and above

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

the old age security pension now paid out of the consolidated revenue fund, that plan will have our support.

May I ask the Prime Minister if that is in his mind, that any insurance scheme would be over and above and without interfering with the pensions paid to all under the present plan? I understood it that way, but perhaps it could be made clear, particularly in view of the questions that have now been asked by the two parties on this side of the house.

May I ask one other question. Would it be the intention of the government to act immediately upon any report received as a result of this inquiry, or is it the intention of the government to have another parliamentary committee look into this important question?

Mr. Diefenbaker: In so far as the first question is concerned, Mr. Speaker, as I said in my statement the course to be followed would be that it would be in addition to, over and above, old age security.

With respect to the second part of the question, that deals with a matter of technique and the manner of consideration by the house after investigation has been made by Mr. Huson; and the matter will have to remain in abeyance until the report is received.

Mr. Richardson: May I ask the Prime Minister a supplementary question on this matter?

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the hon. member would defer his question until the orders of the day are called.

Mr. Solon E. Low (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to make one comment on the announcement made by the Prime Minister and then ask a question. I think the time has arrived when the government of Canada should make a real effort to have old age pensions, particularly, placed on such a basis that they could be taken out of politics, that is, they could be removed as far as possible from the position of a political football. I was wondering if that was in the Prime Minister's mind. Is it his purpose to try to get these pensions established on such a basis that they would be removed from the auction sale? I feel that has been one of the worst features of this whole business.

Mr. Diefenbaker: There is nothing in the nature of an auction sale in the announcement I made. Certainly the objective the hon. member has in mind is one that will appeal in general, I am sure. When the investigation has been conducted by Mr. Huson, then the matter will be brought before the house and such consideration given to it, either by submission to a committee or otherwise, as will be necessary in