

circumstances. I should like however, to point out to him and to the government that the people who are on the old age pension and those in later years who ought to be receiving it but who are denied the pension for one reason or another find it difficult to understand the long delay that seems to have to take place before satisfactory amendments can be made to the Old Age Pension Act or to the regulations. They are not critical of the pieces of social legislation which have been introduced and passed, particularly during the session of last year, but they find it hard to understand how huge sums of money can be found for other desirable pieces of social legislation and yet for it not be possible to make any substantial increase in the amount of the old age pension. In particular they cannot understand why it has not been found possible to abolish what for the sake of brevity I shall refer to as the means test provisions in the act and in the regulations. It is because of that feeling on the part of old people that I would ask the Minister of Finance to make a brief statement on behalf of the government, and if he will do so there are two questions to which I should like him to direct his attention. The first is this. Has any progress been made in connection with implementing the suggestions made to the minister on June 2 and June 5 of last year? My second question is this. Now that the date of the election has been announced, has the government any announcement to make as to its intention with regard to old age pensions? That is giving the minister a golden opportunity. I do so because I speak not only for myself but, I am sure, for private members in all parts of this house when I say that we are keenly interested in something being done as quickly as possible to improve the lot of our old age pensioners.

Mr. ILSLEY: I did not anticipate that this subject would come up to-night and I have not any documents or any officials with me. The hon. gentleman asks whether any progress has been made in procuring amendments to the present old age pension regulations and says that it is hard to understand why it takes so long to get these amendments made. If he were in the position of administering the Ottawa end of the Old Age Pension Act he would very soon find out what are the reasons for delay in having amendments made to these regulations.

I had a long list compiled of the suggestions that were made in the house last summer. I do not know that I would approve all of them myself; I never undertook to approve them or to try to have the suggested amendments made. But there was one—I cannot remember at the moment what

it was—which I regarded as desirable, and in December or January we started in to try to have that amendment made. We have been corresponding with the provinces ever since and we have not yet reached agreements with the provinces. It is almost impossible to obtain amendments to the regulations because one has to get agreements with the nine provinces. What happens is that you write to a province, and the province comes back with a counter suggestion. You say: No; let us stick to the original suggestion; you have the same thing going on with one province after another, and that goes on and on ad infinitum. I do not think any effective step can be taken to deal with our old age pension system without a dominion-provincial conference.

The hon. gentleman says, why is not something done to raise the old age pension? I have repeatedly stated in this house that we regard that as a provincial responsibility. As the hon. gentleman knows, we have enormous demands upon the dominion treasury, in the fields which are our responsibility, and we are by no means niggardly in response to the requests of member after member of this house to loosen up. We loosen up sometimes more often than I approve. But I realize that in pleading the cause of the general taxpayer I am pleading an unpopular cause here when I listen to members of this house saying: Spend, spend, spend. I realize that this is probably the wish of the members of the house.

But in this matter of old age pensions I have made it quite clear that we regard it as primarily a provincial responsibility. The provinces all have heavy surpluses and are infinitely more prosperous, governmentally speaking, than the dominion, and there is nothing to prevent any province from raising the old age pension to thirty-five or forty or fifty dollars a month if they see fit to do so. Some provinces regard a higher rate as more appropriate than do other provinces. It depends on the feeling of the people of the particular section of the dominion affected.

All I can say about old age pensions is this. I have made the statement here in the house in the past. I said two or three years ago that if the provinces thought the rate ought to be higher and all made that request, we would give consideration to making the rate higher, and we finally did that. They requested that it be raised from twenty to twenty-five dollars. We did that. Later I suggested that if the provinces were of the view that we should lower the age to sixty-