

Old Age Security

followed immediately by the enactment of the government annuities measure. The committee of 1924 led to the introduction in 1926, and the passage in 1927 by parliament, of the first Old Age Pensions Act. The act of 1927 is the foundation of the legislation which is in effect in all parts of our country today. It is based on the principle of dominion-provincial co-operation and partnership, thus conforming to the constitutional situation which prevailed in 1927 and which prevails today.

So far as the proposal to establish a joint committee of both houses on old age security is concerned, the facts of the situation will speak for themselves. What we want, and I think what the country wants, is a committee to study in objective fashion all the various aspects of this important and complicated problem.

I do not feel it would be appropriate at this stage for me to argue the case for any particular type of old age security legislation. I do believe, however, that changing factors and the complexity of the problem, which have been given intensive study by the department which I administer and by the government itself, should also be examined carefully and studiously by parliament, and that public opinion should at the same time have the opportunity to express itself on all aspects of this matter. The committee, if and when established, will represent both houses and all political parties. It will provide an opportunity to representatives of labour, industry, agriculture and social welfare organizations, as well as other interested groups, to make their views known on this vital social question.

The study which the joint committee will give to this problem will naturally, of course, take into account the limits of the constitutional powers of parliament in connection with old age security, and the relative areas of jurisdiction of both federal and provincial authorities. It was with full recognition of this division of constitutional responsibility that parliament passed the Old Age Pensions Act of 1927.

I think it is only fair to say that there is undoubtedly a growing feeling in Canada for some type of contributory system of old age security. While there are indications that some members are changing their views in this particular, the fact is that until recently, within the last few days, no members of the house except those of the Social Credit party have opposed this idea. It must be recognized, however, that a contributory scheme calling for compulsory payments by beneficiaries on a national basis will involve a constitutional amendment, just as our Unemployment Insurance Act was preceded by an amendment to the British North America Act.

[Mr. Martin.]

These limitations on the federal power to legislate in the field of compulsory contributory social insurance remain today a vital factor in any consideration we may give to the question of planning proper measures of old age security for our population. At the conference to be held this fall undoubtedly the matter of old age retirement will provide a basis for discussion between the federal and provincial governments.

It will be a matter of the greatest importance, therefore, for the government, and I think also for the provinces, to have considered and careful study given to this problem, in the light of changing factors, by a committee made up of representatives of all political parties and both houses of parliament. When this committee starts its work, one of the first things it will want to do will be to assess carefully the facts of social benefit that have emerged since the passage of the act in 1927.

As the house knows, successive amendments have been made to the original legislation, particularly those of 1937, 1947 and 1949, which have greatly extended the benefits and the coverage of this important social security measure. It will be found that the present old age pensions provisions—in the language of the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent), by no means perfect—do provide features that make our legislation compare favourably with that of any other country in the world. Here are some of the facts that the committee will want to assess.

1. The number of pensioners has increased sevenfold, from 42,000 in 1930 to 293,000 in March of 1950.
2. The number of pensioners has doubled in the last thirteen years, from 146,524 in March, 1937, to 293,000 in March, 1950.
3. The maximum pension has been increased 100 per cent in the last seven years, from \$20 at the start of 1943 to \$40 in 1949. There has been a sixty per cent increase in pension in the last three years, from \$25 in 1947 to \$40 in 1949.
4. The amount of allowable income, including pension, has been increased from \$365 per year to \$600 a year for single persons, and \$1,080 for married persons, with even higher limits of \$1,200 and \$1,320 where one or both spouses are blind.
5. The federal government's annual expenditures on old age pensions have increased threefold in seven years, from \$33½ million in 1943-44, to \$67 million in 1948-49, and to \$103,626,000 in 1950-51.
6. Federal expenditures on old age pensions have more than doubled in the last three