

Pensions Act

Miss LaMarsh: Mr. Chairman, I thank the hon. member for trying to spare our correspondence, and I would like to inform him that hereafter I will be careful, in order that he is not further embarrassed, to address him as "Dear Sir."

Mr. Howard: She has broken my heart.

Miss LaMarsh: The information he asked for is something which I think I cannot give. For one thing, I do not remember it offhand, and I do not have it with me. Second, I do not see that it would assist members of the committee in any way to know which provinces did this.

It may be recalled that in answer to a number of questions I stated that this matter would be placed before the provinces. That preliminary discussion was held in September last, and then deferred for a full scale discussion when the premiers of the provinces might be present, and this took place a couple of weeks ago. At that time the subject of discussion was the type of over-all program which looks at need, the type of program which says, "Does this man or woman need public assistance;" and this kind of test is a more modern one, and one which does fill in the gaps which presently exist with regard to categorical programs.

The provinces expressed an interest in exploring future legislation of this kind, and as a result each premier, speaking on behalf of his province, indicated that he was prepared to enter into a series of consultative talks at the civil service level, so that it may take some considerable time to work out a program and recommend it to the federal and provincial governments.

These programs, being shared programs in which the federal government in two cases pays 50 per cent of the cost, and in one case 75 per cent of the cost, can be, and have been in the past on more than one occasion, imposed by the federal government on the provinces as a serious burden, particularly when they come at a point late in the fiscal year of the federal government and the provincial governments, when money has not been allocated in either the federal or provincial treasuries for them.

In the past there has not always been consultation between the provinces and the federal government, and accordingly what has happened is that federal members, in enacting federal legislation, impose an insuperable burden on the provincial governments, because they are then placed in a position that if they do not enact their own legislative changes, in order to keep up with the standard to which the federal government has led the way, they are put in very serious political disability with their own people.

Accordingly we would want to discuss this. We are moving ahead with what we hope will be a better type of program in the future, but admittedly it will take some period of time to bring about agreement on all sides. At all times it has been indicated it was the intention of the federal government, once the future of these programs was ascertained, to move to bring them up to the same level as the old age security payments.

This is the approach which I am sorry my hon. friend from Perth appears to have forgotten was mentioned in the white paper on the Canada pension plan in July, and which was mentioned by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. In the interim, and after consultation with the provinces two weeks ago, the same amount of money, \$10 per month, was agreed to by the government and that proposal is now before the committee.

One hon. member inquired why the figure of \$120 a month earned income was decided upon. There have been various sums in the past, but it was decided that this amount is sufficient to permit everyone to get the benefit of this \$10, and not to suffer by having it cut down, as was mentioned by the hon. member for Skeena. All the provinces asked for a greater exemption of the income ceiling, but I can tell the hon. member for Quebec-Montmorency that neither his province nor any other suggested that the income ceiling exemption should be greater than it now is in this bill.

The hon. member for Perth said that this legislation should have been presented earlier. I am at a loss to understand a speech such as that, because he and his colleagues are constantly making speeches about the need for consultation with the provinces in advance of action. We do this, and then my hon. friend complains that we have not gone charging in on our own. He cannot have it both ways. We believe that advance consultation with the provinces on matters that will impose a financial burden upon them is the right way to do it, and this is the reason we approached it in this way.

Of course, it might be possible to back date this program to October 1. It provides some administrative problems, I was informed by some provinces, and some were negative in their approach; but their main consideration was the fiscal one. We asked each province in turn to say at what month they thought we should begin payment, and almost half of them placed it as far ahead as April 1 next. As a result of this legislation when it passes—as I assume it will, since from all sides of the house agreement has been indicated—it will be necessary to amend 36 agreements, as I pointed out, which we have