

Newfoundland

be available to the senior citizens of Newfoundland. These older people are in the evening of life, and the government of Canada ought to realize, as no doubt it has, that delay in the payment of old age pensions is a serious matter. The time element is now more important than ever to these people. It could easily happen, and this has been the experience of nearly everybody who has had anything to do with this work, that they might go for months before the machinery is set up and all of the qualifications met.

From March 31 to when the first cheque is issued may be quite a long time, particularly in the minds of many older citizens in the new province. Has the Prime Minister given any consideration to this? If the provincial legislature of Newfoundland were to enact at the earliest opportunity a piece of legislation which would have the effect of bringing in old age pensions, and were to make it retroactive to March 31, is there anything to hinder this government from recognizing that retroactive provision and making these payments in bulk when the first payment is made?

Mr. St. Laurent: There is, in the present act. The present act merely provides for operation in the future, and it would require special legislation to implement my hon. friend's suggestion. The matter was given very careful consideration by the delegation when it was here. There were members of the delegation who were most anxious to find some way by which old age pensions could become payable at the earliest possible moment. They even gave consideration to the possibility of the commission of government enacting, while still in office, a system of old age pensions, and providing for the payment of the old age pensions in the budget that it will make for provincial purposes. But we were informed that, after giving the matter serious consideration, the members of the commission of government felt it was something that it would not be proper for them to do. It was something of very great consequence, and it was felt that the responsibility for doing it should be taken by a legislature elected by the people of Newfoundland.

I may say quite frankly they were told that, if there could be found any way that would make it possible to have that done, without creating the obvious situation that the people of Newfoundland were being treated better than Canadians had been treated in that regard, we would be happy to give it very sympathetic consideration. But they came to the conclusion that their commission of government would not take the responsibility of introducing a system of old age pensions in their dying hours, and that they would have to leave that responsibility

to a legislature elected by the people of Newfoundland.

Mr. Drew: Of course, I think it would be appropriate to explain at that point that this is one of the reasons why some objections are being raised in Newfoundland to the procedure being followed. If there had been a legislature, then it would have been possible for that legislature to set up the social service organizations which could have handled payments of this kind, which called for certain provisions of supervision under the dominion act covering this and similar payments. Through the fact that no legislative authority exists, it is at the present time impossible to set up that supervisory organization. And I think perhaps it is well that we do realize that this is one of the reasons why in Newfoundland there is some objection to the procedure. While that is not a responsibility of ours within this House of Commons, it does explain one of the grounds of criticism of the procedure which has been followed.

Mr. St. Laurent: But I think the delay would have been even longer had there been resort to the establishment of responsible government. To make this thing work conveniently, it has to come into effect on April 1, or thereabouts, of the year. A delay of two or three months might have meant a delay of a year in bringing union with Newfoundland into workable operation.

The members of the delegation were quite disappointed they were not able to find some way whereby they could bring that into operation immediately. It would have been, I understand, within the legal power of the commission of government to do it, because they do enact statutes; but they felt it was a matter they were not prepared to undertake. At least that was what we were told at the time. Even if now there were enacted legislation providing for a Newfoundland system of pensions within the terms of our legislation, it might possibly be given effect to. But, as we were told, the commission of government would not contemplate assuming that responsibility.

Mr. Graydon: It seems to me that these two governments—or one government, and the representatives of the province about to come in—could surely have worked out some arrangement. Surely this obstacle which, as it has been explained by the Prime Minister, does not seem formidable, is not so great that the red tape could not have been cut in this instance. Surely the two governments could have got together to give the old age pensioners of Newfoundland their pensions on March 31. Many times, in this chamber and in others, red tape much more involved than this has been cut without any difficulty, to give relief where it was needed. I do not