

Statute Law Amendment Act, 1970

Age Security Act will wait. The member for Winnipeg North Centre will ask questions about them week after week, but come the end of the session nothing will have been done. That is not a very hopeful prediction, Mr. Speaker. Well, if it sounds a bit cynical, I throw to the government the challenge to prove me wrong.

Mr. Lloyd Francis (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, after listening to the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) I am happy to say, in contrast to the debate last week, that I agree with some of his remarks. Those of us who have followed the pension issue certainly agree that a good deal more should be done. Any groups that have been excluded from this measure should receive equal treatment. No doubt there are some basic principles that could be put into the framework of proper pension legislation. I wish to make a few comments in reply to some of the points that the hon. member has made. I feel these remarks should be on the record.

The hon. member referred to the pension plan for members of this House as a guaranteed annual income. I intend to make one or two observations in this regard. Contributions based on current service go from \$720 to \$1,440. Those members of this House who make up their arrears of contributions back to 1963 will have made a payment of \$4,860, plus interest. This amount will be in addition to current contributions. When we talk of guaranteed annual supplements, guaranteed annual incomes and all the rest of it, I think there is some obligation to put the increased contributions and the actuarial sum on the record. A great many of those elected to this House will never draw a penny of benefits. They will have the privilege of paying fairly substantial amounts of money into this fund and those amounts will be refunded to them without a penny of interest after their service, even after the adoption of these amendments.

I wish to make a few comments on the important measure before us, the escalation of pensions for a large number of people. My colleague, the hon. member for Ottawa East (Mr. Richard), chaired the committee which brought in a report three years ago recommending that increases be made in pensions of those who have retired. This recommendation has been consistently supported by a large number of members of this House. We are proud and delighted to see that something has come out of it.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has made a substantial point with regard to war veterans allowances and the increases under this bill. This point was discussed in committee, Mr. Speaker. There was an exchange between the hon. member and myself the other day during the debate on the report stage. I would like to review the point because I feel the hon. member is mistaken in what he is contending. I will refer to the situation of two widows, one of whom is eligible for war veterans allowance and the other not. If the hon. member's procedure were adopted, it would introduce into the war veterans allowance scheme a principle of discrimination. The widow who is receiving this benefit would be permitted an addition which would not be permitted to any other widow under the war veterans allowance scheme.

There have been only two revisions to the pensions of widows of civil servants. One was in the late fifties, under the previous administration, and this is the second. How often have war veterans allowances been adjusted? The last adjustment was less than three years ago. The widow who is benefiting from the war veterans allowance has at least had the benefit of a regular revision, however inadequate in the view of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

The attempt to introduce amendments to war veterans allowances by means of amendments in other pieces of legislation such as this, can only destroy the uniformity of the war veterans allowances scheme. The proposal to increase the ceiling of payments under the War Veterans Allowance Act by an amendment in this bill is not appropriate. I had hoped the hon. member would recognize that it is not a clear, logical or fair thing to pick out one category of war veterans allowance beneficiaries and say they should be given benefits which are denied to other recipients. If the hon. member would think it through, he would be the first to agree that if we once started on that thorny path we would make uniform distribution of war veterans allowance impossible.

I look forward to improved standards of pension administration. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has done an excellent job of setting some long-term targets to which many of us subscribe with all our hearts. The approach I had hoped the hon. member would have taken with regard to the measure before us would have been to say here is one small group of people, numerically, and any changes that are introduced should be consistent with the principles he advocates.