

*Old Age and Veterans' Pensions*

technique and point out all the wonders in the brave new world of the future. When we have deliberated at length upon the white paper arising from the Woods report, and after the government in its wisdom has digested and dissected the contents of that report, we will arrive at the most comprehensive welfare program for all the needy citizens of Canada. I say this is a red-herring technique because it begs the question before us today, which is the immediate needs of the two groups, our senior citizens and veterans. I want to concentrate on these two areas this evening.

In this discussion, Mr. Speaker, we are concerned with the matter of pensions generally. We are concerned with pensions as a means of providing continuous income following retirement or, in the case of veterans, because of disabilities and problems contracted in their service to Canada. Sometimes I think that the private sector of the economy is much more alive and alert to the need for an adequate pension program than is the public sector. Pensions are the most important means of maintaining income beyond the productive years of all Canadians. This principle has been well recognized over many decades so far as the special service of our military is concerned.

The old age security pension was established as a matter of right back in the 1950's. It was placed on a self-supporting basis by the Parliament of that day and it is largely on that basis that this fund is maintained. I am sure everyone who looks at the matter objectively will agree that inflation has placed the rate of payment under the old age security program away out of line with the cost of living. There is no reason at all, Mr. Speaker, why the intent of this resolution should not be carried out immediately—and "immediately" is the operative word—by the government. Pensions of all kinds, whether they be in the private or public sector, are awarded for services rendered. I think this government would be remiss in its duty if it did not accept the suggestion in the resolution and proceed to deal with obvious inadequacies in this area.

A moment ago, Mr. Speaker, I said that sometimes I get the feeling that the private sector is much more alert and conscious of its obligations in this regard than is the government. In this connection I should like to bring to the attention of the government and the House the action being taken on behalf of employees of Canadian National Railway who

[Mr. Dinsdale.]

have been endeavouring to have discussions with the government in order to bring their pension scheme into line with changing economic and social circumstances. I shall read briefly from the petition of the CNR employees to indicate how reasonable are their requests. This petition states in part:

At a time of rising cost of living, at a time when the railway worker is being held the hardest to the government wage guidelines, we need the right to adequately provide for our own future, we need the right to provide adequately for those who retired ahead of us, we need the right through our own union to negotiate the following changes into the plan.

These are the reasonable requests that the employees of the CNR are making at this time. It is my understanding that the government, as it has in so many instances, is failing to come to grips with this aspect of pension problems. The CNR employees make the following suggestions:

1. Increase the benefit to not less than 2 per cent per year.
2. Widow's allowance to be increased to 75 per cent.
3. Voluntary retirement at age 55 with no deduction for early retirement.
4. Cost of living clause to cover past, present and future pensioners.
5. All improvements to be retroactive to cover those persons on pension.
6. The pension board include a pensioner, and the chairman be neutral.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure you will agree that this petition is eminently reasonable and there is no valid reason for the government having thus far neglected to respond to it. This resolution is necessary because the government is dedicated to the pursuit of the just society—we might use the phrase "social justice"—rather than pursuing social justice with alacrity and has been using the old stalling devices of delay and buck-passing.

It used to be that politicians, particularly when in power, resorted to royal commissions as a basis for delay. This government has a new technique, the establishment of innumerable committees. In the first instance a royal commission report comes into the hands of the government. Then the government prepares a white paper. The white paper is referred to a Parliamentary committee, where it is deliberated upon for an interminable time. Months and even years go by in the process. This has resulted in the situation where we have disparity between the rising cost of living and the level of compensation payment under the two pension plans being discussed today.