

PENSIONS—REQUEST FOR INTERIM INCREASE
PENDING WHITE PAPER ON SOCIAL
SECURITY

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday December 3, as recorded in *Hansard* at page 1551, I put a question to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro). I might point out that on that day Christmas was still over three weeks away. My question was as follows:

Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that having to wait for the government to produce the white paper on social security is resulting in considerable delay in increasing the amount of the old age security pension, I should like to ask the Minister of National Health and Welfare whether the government will consider granting an interim increase in those pensions as a way of saying Merry Christmas to our retired people?

The reply of the Minister of National Health and Welfare was one in which, albeit there were a couple of interruptions, he made two references: first, to the acceleration that takes place annually in the old age security pension and, second, to the Canada Assistance Plan. I suggested that I would not comment on the acceleration which in January will be at the rate of \$1.58 a month for in my view that is hardly to be called an increase in the pension, particularly when the so-called cost of living increase is running 2 or 3 per cent behind the actual increase in the cost of living.

So, Mr. Speaker, although it is so close to Christmas now that the chances of the government doing anything for our old people are pretty slim, there is always next Christmas, and perhaps if one keeps at this week in and week out, month in and month out, even this government might some day do something. Mr. Speaker, these white papers may be pure and lily white but they are certainly causing an awful lot of delay in this House of Commons.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): That is what they are for.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): My leader has made a very pertinent comment. I suggest that it is not fair to ask our old people, of all our people, to wait for their glimpse of the just society until we get this white paper on social security.

I do not know what the white paper is going to suggest or foretell, but surely it is going to call for some improvements in the lot of our older and retired people. Surely, it is not going to recommend any cut-backs.

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Surely, it is not going to leave things as they are. There is only one way those who will produce the white paper can move, and that is up so far as the pensions of our retired people are concerned. That being the case I suggest that a payment on account, an interim adjustment, could well be made without waiting for the white paper itself.

I recognize this is a suggestion that is being made in a number of quarters. The veterans' organizations are suggesting that there be an interim increase in the basic pension and in the war veterans allowance until a final decision is made. I realize that if we give this interim increase with respect to one group requests will be made that it be given with respect to others, but I think it is perfectly justifiable for us to make this suggestion.

I believe we all agreed with the interjections that were made yesterday when the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) asked a question about old age pensions and got the reply that a white paper is coming. As he and several other members said, do you expect the old people to live on or to eat white paper? In effect, that is what the government is asking many of our retired people to do for another six months, another year and maybe longer. In fact, many of our retired people will die before there is any increase in the pension if they have to wait and live on these references to the proposed white paper.

I know that one of the stock answers is for government spokesmen to tell us how much the government has done in the field of social security over the last 50 years since the party now in power first got into that field. But the fact is that in relative terms, in terms of what is happening now with the higher cost of living, and with everybody else getting an increase, it is unfair that our older people, our retired citizens generally, our retired veterans, our retired civil servants and all the rest have to wait until we get a white paper.

I am not asking that any adjustments made now be the final answer. I know that after we have an over-all look at things a pattern will be developed. But in the meantime, assuming the government is going to move forward I think it is fair to ask for an interim adjustment of a reasonable magnitude, and I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary who is going to answer tonight has been given instructions or authority from the department to say that yes, the government does want to say Merry Christmas to our older people, not just with words but with something that is solid and substantial.