

The Address—Mr. S. Knowles

official opposition had only one member present which, together with the eight government members, was not enough to form a quorum. When the government holds only eight of nineteen seats on a committee, Mr. Speaker, and when one of the eight is a non-voting chairman, there is absolutely no reason why the resulting legislation should not be the best possible product of the several points of view represented in this House.

The official opposition have, in fact, amply illustrated their committee control by arbitrarily terminating debate, using a closure procedure which they have themselves found so distasteful in the House on certain previous occasions.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Herbert: I want to make one closing remark to the official opposition. If you want to illustrate to the people of this country that you have the ability to govern, stop being hypocritical. When you talk of inflation, produce constructive and specific ideas. Read the speech made by Chairman Earl McLaughlin to the Royal Bank's last annual meeting. All of us supported the social legislation passed by this House in the last session. Let us not turn our backs on it by indirect reference. This government's accomplishments in the last session, despite its minority position, make us all very proud. Co-operate and make this session equally good for Canada.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, it is true that during 1973 this parliament enacted a number of pieces of very worth while social legislation. I refer in particular to the increases that were made in the pensions and supplementary benefits paid under the Old Age Security Act, to improved family allowances, to improvements in pensions and allowances for veterans, and to other, similar measures. I also have in mind the arrangements which were made for escalating almost all pensions that come under government jurisdiction, namely to increase them not just by 2 per cent per annum but by the full percentage increase in the cost of living.

● (2050)

As I say, all of us in this House can regard 1973 as a year when we did a pretty fair job in the field of social security. I want to say that I am not unduly concerned when the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) tries to take the full credit for that legislation to the Liberal party. The fact is the people of Canada realize that a great deal more was done in one year in this parliament of minorities than would normally be done in five or six years in a parliament in which there is a government majority. The people know why we got some good legislation in 1973.

However, I want to say that I am deeply concerned over the almost complete lack of reference to this whole area in this session's Speech from the Throne. The government is already acting as though it did enough with respect to social security in 1973 and so it can just coast along, leaving this question alone in 1974.

I recognize that in the Speech from the Throne there are one or two references to the Canada Pension Plan where improvements will be made. I am also aware of the discussions about welfare policies that are taking place among

[Mr. Herbert.]

the health and welfare ministers of Canada and the provinces. However, as far as this session's Speech from the Throne is concerned, one gets the impression that the government thinks that nothing needs to be done this year in the social security field. I challenge that proposition as strongly as I can.

I say to the government and to members in all parts of this House that already the values that were added to pensions and other social payments last year are running short of today's cost of living. Already those who are on the receiving end of these various programs are justifiably feeling the time has come for still further adjustments.

It is not good enough to say that arrangements were made in 1973 to escalate most pension benefits by the full percentage increase in the cost of living, as though that is all that needs to be done. There are two things to say about that. First, in most cases the base itself was not high enough. Second, welcome though it is that the escalation is not limited by a 2 per cent ceiling, it is still a fact that the escalation is always a few months behind.

A few days ago the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) put out a release about the automatic increases in old age security and the guaranteed income supplement that will take place in the month of April, a few weeks hence. That increase will be based on a rise in the cost of living that began in the month of November. In fact, it is based upon the cost of living in November, December and January compared with the three months immediately preceding the month of November. When pensioners do not get an increase in their pensions until the end of April for the purpose of meeting the cost of living increase of the previous November, they are always getting behind. Therefore, I call upon the government and this House to shake off any lethargy it may feel about this issue.

I call upon the government and I call upon the House to realize that the pensioners of Canada very soon will not be saying "It is wonderful what you did for us in 1973." They will be saying "Why did you forget us in 1974?" Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I plead that in this session of parliament this House must put on the government the kind of pressure that will force it to act in this important field.

When Notices of Motion and Private Members' Public Bills appear on the order paper in a few days, hon. members will see among those Notices of Motion one in my name which calls on the government to give consideration to increasing the basic amount of the old age security pension to \$200 a month, payable to all. I urge that this be taken very seriously. That figure is already becoming a minimum figure for pensioners, provided they meet certain tests, in a number of our provinces. Surely no one can argue that anything less than \$200 a month is an amount upon which anyone can live in Canada today.

My resolution that will appear on the order paper in a few days not only calls for the pension paid under the Old Age Security Act to be increased to \$200 a month. It also calls for the pension age to be lowered to 60 under both the Old Age Security Act and the Canada Pension Plan.

As hon. members are aware, this matter came in for a good deal of discussion during the session of parliament that occupied 1973. When it was under discussion, whether