

Supplementary Retirement Benefits

He has generally been the man who knew how to say no, no, to increases for this group of public servants, no to that group of public servants, no when he was asked for more flexibility in dealing with the post office workers, no when it was pointed out to him time and again that he was injuring terribly the people in many parts of the country by his extension of the iniquitous prevailing wage rate system. He was the man who said no when it was suggested that those who were longshoremens on the east coast deserved the same pay as those on the west coast. He said the same thing about the nurses. He also was the one who was not able to say yes when we protested that firefighters at the Charlottetown airport were not properly served if they were getting a lower rate than firefighters in other parts of the country. It is not, I suppose, quite right to say that Scrooge has become Santa Claus, but it is interestingly close enough to attract the attention of those who have watched this minister so long.

Something less pleasant is the impact on any thoughtful member of parliament that here is another measure which illuminates and dramatizes the extent of inflation which is raging across the country. We are trying in this measure, as we tried in the one yesterday, to bring about some small measure of amelioration, some tiny piece of protection against something which is rampaging the land and affecting the people of Canada, every one. It is another partial measure, and of course in so far as it does help we are glad that it has come about although it has been a long, long time coming.

One of the distressing things about this resumed emergency session of parliament is the lack of alacrity, if I may put it that way, of the government in bringing forward such measures as it deigns to ask to be legislated. I think that in all my years here I never before found myself getting ready for a sitting of the House without, until an hour or two before I went into the chamber, having any idea of what, in fact, would be on the parliamentary agenda for that day. It not only took the whole of the session before, but the whole of the recess and of the resumed session for a determination to be made that the three measures we now have before us would be introduced. This indicates something less than a galvanic ability to deal with the problems of the land.

The bill is also startling and dramatic when you read that the figure 2 per cent was once regarded as something less than fantastic, unreal, as a cost of living escalator. But that figure is not a drop in the bucket with the inflation we have now, something like 14 per cent in those essentials of daily life per year. Of course, many people thought at the time that the 2 per cent was unreal and inadequate, but how far from reality it seems today. One would think we were talking about a bygone era, yet it is only a few years ago that 2 per cent was within the bounds of possibility.

● (1210)

The bill also causes us to reflect again upon the fact that certain groups of Canadians, in this case those who have served the country well for a long time, have been bearing the burden of inflation. The people to whom this measure refers are Canadians who have served the government, who have served the people for many many years. Most thoughtful people in our society, even in these days of

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

early and easy obsolescence, have pondered about their future. A great financial institution at one time had the slogan, and they may still have it, "Make your future more secure". We used to believe that whatever disadvantage there might be in entering the Public Service, at least there was security. Now, we know what has happened to that security. We know that many public servants who thought they had a pension which would give them security in their later years, have found it to be totally inadequate.

One of the disturbing things that I have noticed in recent months is the actual discomfort of so many of the people involved. There are thousands upon thousands of Canadians whose plans for retirement have been altered because the purchasing power of their dollar has been diminished. Every day we get letters from people who had thought that by careful planning they would be able to retire at such and such an age. Not long ago I talked to a very bright executive in a private company who was ready to retire next year. However, he said that considering what the dollar buys today he will have to work for at least another five years, and if this inflation continues he will never be able to stop work completely. This is a man who is not by any means on the bottom rung of the ladder.

Mr. Speaker, inflation is the sworn enemy of any kind of security that thoughtful people have tried to provide for their families and their own declining years. Inflation that has got out of hand is more than a political problem, more than the subject of political argument. It is a grim and, I would say, a criminal social problem which effectively shatters the future plans of people because of a government's inability to keep the economic and fiscal operation of the country under reasonable control. To tell people living in a country where inflation is soaring that they will make their future more secure by doing such and such a thing is preaching an incredible and incredulous doctrine.

It is interesting that a portion of this bill refers to something which is just and proper, that is the dropping of the age to allow people with long service to retire earlier. Yet because of the effect of inflation, the diminishing value of the dollar, many people are finding that they have actually to work longer. In a country like this, any citizen at age 60 should be able to step out of the work force if he wishes and have his future needs looked after. But the opposite prevails.

I am not going to go into these matters in detail, Mr. Speaker, but just want to make a few more general remarks. There is one group that we have to take note of and that is members of parliament. The member of parliament is used to being a target because of what he is able to eat and what kind of office he is supplied. I even noticed some criticism recently about the gymnastic facilities that members have on the hill, and I thought I should go about the country demonstrating that probably no group needs them more than members of parliament!

However, I was looking at the report on members of parliament retiring allowances. I discovered that only one person of the many who have come here, having given up their profession or business, was in the top bracket giving him an annual pension of \$8,000 to \$8,999. I believe that man was in the House for about 30 years. The next man