

*The Address—Mr. Knowles*

British North America Act so far as old age pensions are concerned. Four or five years from now we do not want another election on the issue of social security, with the Liberal party going to the country and saying, "We tried to do it, but this province or that province interfered." This time I hope the government will approach the provinces in a manner that will bring forth co-operation and get this job done. It is not going to be satisfactory to the Canadian people in 1953 or 1954 to throw out the Liberals because they did not bring in a proper social security plan. What the people of this country want is for this parliament, this government which they put in power, to do the job now.

In common with a good many members of this House of Commons who have come back for another term, during this past week I have spent quite a few hours going through my filing cabinets with a view to getting rid of some of the material that has piled up over the years. One thing that has amazed me has been the number of files relating to old age pensioners that need no longer be retained because those people have passed away without having had the opportunity of enjoying a decent old age pension which this parliament should have given them. I hope there will be no more delay in connection with this measure.

Mr. Speaker, it is our contention that something should be done about the Old Age Pensions Act immediately, and we feel there are other things that should be done as well, such as the raising of the amount and the lowering of the eligible age, and so on. For the purpose of this debate, however, we have tried to pinpoint our attack on one item, namely, the means test, and that is the issue now before the house.

In addition to amending the Old Age Pensions Act, there are other ways in which the government could show its interest in social security, its interest in the welfare of the old people. I have raised in this house on many occasions the plight of our superannuated civil servants. Members who were here in the last session of the last parliament will remember that, towards the end of that session, a prolonged debate took place during which the members of all parties called upon the government to reverse its stubborn position in this matter and do the fair thing by these retired civil servants. That is something they could do right now to show they are genuinely interested, not in just talking about it or using it as a campaign slogan during elections, but in doing something for our older people.

Another way in which something could be done in the broader contributory field in

[Mr. Knowles.]

which we are interested is by bringing in a railroad retirement act similar to that in the United States. Again, I will not take the time to go into it because I have done so a good many times before; and what has interested me in this chamber, when I have argued the case for a railroad retirement act, is that despite the fact that some hon. members regard me as a nuisance on these matters and despite the fact that members are opposed to me politically, the house has always followed with interest my appeal for a proper railroad pension plan.

I mention railroad workers in particular because they are a group whose labour relations are already under federal jurisdiction. In other words, it seems to me that no amendment to the British North America Act is required to bring in a railroad retirement act for workers who come under federal jurisdiction. There again is a chance for this government with its huge majority to show whether it is interested in over-all social security, whether it is interested in getting something started, or whether we are in for another four or five years of political foot-balling over the British North America Act, with the result that nothing gets done.

I also want to say a few words about the need for more definite and progressive steps in the field of national health. My leader referred to this subject again this afternoon. It too is one of the fields in which we feel that the people of this country expect fulfilment during the course of this parliament, and they do not expect this government to wait until the eve of the next election. They want action now.

In this whole question of doing something for the health of our people there are three main fields in which action must be taken. In the first place, provision must be made of adequate equipment and personnel—hospitals, doctors, technicians, nurses, dentists and so on. In the second place, there must be health insurance to enable the people to pay for the services. It is no use having the best services and the best doctors available if people cannot afford to make use of them. In the third place there is required in a great many cases in this country, and increasingly so, a sickness benefit to take the place of the pay envelope that stops when the worker is off sick. Despite all the publicity that has been given and all the talk about the forward steps being taken by this government in the field of health, this government has so far really dealt with only the first of these three things. It has asked parliament to provide money, and parliament has done so readily, to assist in the building of hospitals and in the providing of the necessary equipment. But literally nothing has been done in the