

The Address—Mr. Knowles

the Minister of Finance (Mr. Harris) is wrestling with the question of whether or not he should increase the rate of the old age security tax. There is no suggestion in such stories of what is really needed, namely an increase in the pension itself.

It is a fact that stories are published in financial papers about the old age security fund being in the red, but nothing is said about what some other services may be costing. Any other item of expense, whether it is on defence, public works, harbours or what have you, is a cost. There just does not happen to be any tax that is particularly earmarked for these expenditures, so the figures are not set side by side. In this case there happens to be what is called an earmarked tax, but it does not mean that the country is in the red because it is paying old age pensions. Not at all. So long as there is money available in the treasury, so long as there is available out of the gross national product of the country money that could improve the lot of old age pensioners, we are not in the red because we do something for our senior citizens.

I insist, as I have in other sessions, particularly since 1949 and 1950 when the figure was set at \$40 a month, that we are not playing fair with our senior citizens and we are not playing fair with ourselves as Canadian citizens if we leave the pension at \$40 a month. It should now be raised to not less than \$60 a month. I call upon the government to shake off its lethargy, its indifference, to shake off the notion that they solved this problem years ago. They only took a step. The problem is still there. If we regard ourselves as a civilized people we have to do more than we have done thus far for our senior citizens. I urge that something be done about that question at this session of parliament.

Like other members who have spoken thus far in this debate, Mr. Speaker, I too welcome most heartily the announcement in the speech from the throne that there will be legislation amending the War Veterans Allowance Act. I welcome in particular the precise information that whatever amendments are brought in they will do at least two things, increase the basic rates of the allowance and raise the level of permissible income. I am not going to get mixed up in the argument that has already taken place as to who is responsible for this action. Perhaps some veteran somewhere wrote a letter to the Prime Minister that really reached him, like the letter from the young lady in Sherbrooke which was sent to him at St. Patrick in 1953.

[Mr. Knowles.]

We do not worry about that. What I do hope, Mr. Speaker, is that when this legislation is brought down it will not be a disappointment. In my view, as has been stated by members on all sides of this house in the last year or two, the Canadian Legion has been very responsible, very conservative in its requests. It has asked that the war veterans allowance be raised to not less than \$60 per month single and \$120 per month married. It has asked that the ceiling on permissible income be raised to not less than \$1,200 single and \$2,000 per year married. I call upon the government, when it introduces that legislation, not to fall below those reasonable requests of the Canadian Legion.

I suggest that the Liberal members in particular, who are happy to stand up and welcome the announcement in the speech from the throne, might well try to get the ear of the members of the government and make it clear to them that they will have to change their tune if, when that legislation is introduced, it provides anything less than has been asked for by the Canadian Legion. In my view their request on behalf of these burnt-out pensioners is legitimate and reasonable. I hope it will be met to the letter.

As one who thinks we can get along with 30-minute rather than 40-minute speeches, Mr. Speaker, I am going to conclude before six o'clock. I am glad I said something that received the approval of those on the opposite side. I shall eliminate some of the notes which I have before me so I can conclude by the adjournment hour.

As others have been pointing out, one of the most serious problems facing the country at the moment is that of unemployment. I, for one, feel that the government just is not conscious of how serious this matter is to the people whom it affects. The government seems to be able to see these things only in terms of statistics; that is all they are, figures on a sheet.

I come back to where I started, Mr. Speaker. I suppose once again somebody had better write the Prime Minister a letter. The Prime Minister's secretaries had better be away on a holiday or having a coffee break so the letter will go in to the Prime Minister himself. Perhaps he should see a letter from an unemployed person whose family is suffering because, in this great country of ours, with all the needs we have, there is no work.

I was disappointed yesterday that the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marler) felt it necessary to take as notice the question I asked him concerning the lay-offs by the Canadian National Railways. It is quite true