

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

(Mr. Munro) and these were the key sentences:

Can the minister say what progress is being made by the review committee which is studying our welfare and pensions programs? Can he say whether attention is being given to the possibility of increasing the old age security pension in proportion to the increases in wages and salaries?

The reply of the Minister of National Health and Welfare was in these words:

As I indicated, Mr. Speaker, all of the income maintenance programs and social welfare programs are being reviewed in this study. No firm conclusions have been arrived at, so it is impossible to say whether any conclusions will relate to an increase in old age security or to some other solution that may be adopted.

Of course, as an answer that ought to get the minister into the Senate where a certain other former member of this place has gone. I said a moment ago that I find it an interesting coincidence that I am asking these two questions on the late show this evening because this gives me the opportunity to make this point: whether we are talking about the pensions of retired civil servants, whether we are talking about the pensions of retired employees of the railways of this country or the pensions of retired employees of private industries, or whether we are talking about the old age security pension, I feel the most important issue that faces us is to build into all these pension programs automatic provisions for the pensions to increase after the point of retirement.

We know of course, that we have in the old age security program, as well as in the Canada Pension Plan, a kind of provision for increases, but these are tied to the cost of living and there is a 2 per cent ceiling on each year's increase. The fact of the matter is that in our society we have not only increases in the cost of living but increases in the standard of living. That is one of the virtues of our society; things do get better.

The way things are now organized, however, things get better only for those people who are still at work. I do not think it is a just or decent society which says to those who have retired, you must live the rest of your years on fixed incomes and you must see the value of that income go down; you must settle for fewer and fewer opportunities to share in those new things brought about in a progressive and growing society.

So I contend, Mr. Speaker, that we have not done enough by just putting a limited cost of living factor into old age security and the Canada Pension Plan, but that we should

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

be building into all of our pension programs an automatic increase tied to the increase in wages and salaries; tied to the increase in our productive capacity; tied to our growing affluence.

I have tried to put this in another way in a notice of motion of mine on the order paper in which I suggest that all pensions should be recalculated each year. We do not ask people on the job to work for ten, 15 or 20 years without any increase in their income. It is a fact of life that they will get their increases. I say it is completely unfair to ask people who are retired not to expect an increase, not just to meet higher costs, but an increase in their living standards.

The point of my question is a plea to the government to include this in its review of our social legislation, and to accept it as important and basic to our program that people who are retired have a right to share in the greater affluence of our society, have a right to have their pensions recalculated upward each year. They have the right to expect that their pensions will keep pace not only with the increase in the cost of living but with the rise in wages and salaries across the years.

I hope, therefore, that we will get the assurance tonight that the government realizes the importance of this issue of keeping pensions in line with the progress that takes place in our society.

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister without Portfolio): Mr. Speaker, I think it is certainly true that more pressure is put upon the unprotected segments of our society; the pension income people or the people who do not have the power to control their wages or income. That pressure is put upon them by other segments of our society which have that control and power.

I should like to recommend to the hon. member who has posed this question that he address a part of his plea and his remarks to those groups which so staunchly support his party; those groups which have the power to demand what they think those segments deserve, regardless of the interest of those people who are unprotected and on fixed incomes.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): They speak for them, don't worry.

Mr. Lang: It is, of course, the objective of this government to combat inflation and in this fashion protect the pensioner and the fixed income person against this diminution.