

The Address—Mr. Stanley Knowles

live to the question of whether you can get a job.

I favour the concept of greater economic development in order that we may support better welfare programs and provide a guaranteed annual income. I favour the tackling of regional disparities, and I believe this country will do these things. I hope and believe that ten years from now Canada will be a better country for all age groups. But there are people in their late 60's, 70's and 80's now who may not live to see this happen. These people are in difficult circumstances and need assistance now. I urge that action on this question be taken during the life of this parliament.

I said, Mr. Speaker, that there were three ministers whose ears I wanted to get, if I could. The second is the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson). I come again to a particular group on whose behalf the older members in this house have heard me speak times without number. I refer to retired civil servants and their widows, retired members of the permanent armed forces, retired R.C.M.P. personnel, and so on.

The battle for something to be done for these people is a long one. I have recounted it so often that I will not do so today. But I remind the house that on May 8, 1967, a joint committee of the Senate and House of Commons tabled a report in which there was a unanimous recommendation for increases in the pensions of federal superannuates. We had the firm promise of the government that consideration would be given to that report. I personally had even more than that; I had the assurance that something would be done, and would be done within a limited period of time, indeed within a few weeks. That was in May, 1967. We are now in September, 1968, and still nothing has been done.

When I asked the Minister of Finance the other day in the question period whether something was going to be done to implement that report, I got the same old answer, "The matter is under consideration". The smiles on the faces of those on the front benches seemed to me to say, "There's Stanley again on this old question. Why doesn't he leave us alone?" Well, he is not going to leave them alone.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): These people are former employees of the federal government and we have a special

responsibility to them, not only as old people and citizens but as former employees. These people hear all this talk about the just society, all this talk about an attack on poverty, and they wonder whether any of that justice will come to them. They also wonder whether any of their poverty will be removed before their days on earth are done.

The report our committee put in was a well documented report. We went into all the aspects of this question. We ascertained the amounts of money in the various superannuation funds. We ascertained the fact that the amount of interest being paid on the funds produces more money each year than is paid out in pensions. The pensioners themselves are quite convinced that their pensions could be increased by sizeable amounts without any drain on the treasury.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, in pleading for this to be done for retired civil servants I am pleading for the acceptance of a principle that I think we will have to put into effect with regard to pensions across the board, namely the principle that people should not be expected to live the rest of their lives on the amount of income that was indicated for them the day they went on pension.

Pensions have to be escalated. People in other sectors of society get a chance to improve their income in one way or another. Our old people are part of society. This is a day, and I welcome it, when there is a tremendous emphasis on youth, on the opportunities which should be created for youth and on the things youth should do for this country. But old age is also a way of life. Older people also have rights, and I suggest that an elementary right, justice itself, is being denied to these people when they are told, once they have their pension, that costs may go up, standards may rise, ways of life may change, but they must get by on the same amount. This means that their standard of living is deteriorated.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, in the name of the retired civil servants, and because there is at stake here a principle that I think we have to work into the whole fabric of our pension arrangements, I urge that the government stop the stalling and delaying that we have had on this important question. The government has admitted in part the principle that pensions have to escalate. We have that, of course, in the old age security pension, now that there is the automatic arrangement for an increase as the cost of living goes up. We