

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Benson) had indicated the programs that were being cut, I asked the Prime Minister whether he would include this question of increasing the pensions of retired civil servants on the list of things that he would attend to before leaving office. His reply on that date, as recorded at page 5474 of *Hansard*, was that he hoped the situation would improve during the remainder of his period as Prime Minister so that this might be possible. Later, on another occasion, I asked the Prime Minister whether conditions had improved to that point. This was on Friday, February 9, 1968, as recorded at page 6558 of *Hansard*, and he said he was still hoping that the situation would improve so this matter could be dealt with.

The story in its entirety is a long one; it covers many years. But the facts are now pretty well known to the members of this house and to the public generally. Our retired civil servants have a case for an increase in their pensions. Other people have, too; but surely the place for the government to begin is with its own employees. That case has been confirmed by the report of the special joint committee to which I have already referred. We were assured time and time again that the matter would be dealt with, but we have been put off and off and off.

I say quite frankly that if this matter is not dealt with under the present Prime Minister, I am not very hopeful that any of the candidates who aspire to be the prime minister in the next session of this house will be as interested in the matter as he is.

Mr. Douglas: There is an exception.

Mr. Knowles: My leader says there is an exception. Perhaps the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. MacEachen), if he is the exception, could indicate where he stands on the matter. It might help him at the April convention.

In any case, I am deadly serious about this. It does seem to me that neither we in the house nor the people who are affected should be insulted and put off any longer by the excuses which are given to us from time to time. The excuse that it was a matter of saving money, as suggested by the President of the Treasury Board last December 7, just does not go down. The excuse that the matter is complicated, just does not wash. The excuse that there is no parliamentary time to deal with it, is not acceptable at all. The need is there; the case has been made. This matter

[Mr. Knowles.]

was dealt with by a previous government, so it can be handled. It is not brand new ground that is being broken. I suggest therefore that the appeal I make is one to which a response should be made. This matter should be dealt with during the present session of parliament before the present Prime Minister leaves office.

My time is nearly up, so without indulging in any histrionics or further argument, may I just ask whatever person opposite is answering my question for the Prime Minister tonight to tell me why this urgent and important question is not on the list of matters to be dealt with before the present Prime Minister leaves office. If it is not yet on that list, I urge that it be put there without delay.

Mr. J. E. Walker (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, in reply to this question I will have to repeat some of the remarks which the hon. member made. Five weeks ago tomorrow, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre asked the Prime Minister on orders of the day a general question regarding legislation which the government hoped to bring forward in the present session. The Prime Minister answered in general terms, and two days later replied more specifically. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre asked a supplementary question to his first one, as recorded at page 6207 of *Hansard*, which reads as follows:

Will the list include provision for increasing the pensions of retired civil servants, so this matter can be dealt with before the present Prime Minister retires?

The reply read as follows:

Mr. Pearson: I would only be in a position to submit the pieces of legislation which are very urgent and of immediate importance; and while the item to which the hon. member refers is of great importance, it is not on the immediate and urgent list.

I say to the hon. member that I think it is less than realistic for him to brush aside the answers which have been given to him and others time and time again by the Prime Minister, the President of the Treasury Board, and myself. Why bother asking the question if he will not listen and understand the answer? I submit that this is the real question.

Another basic question is: When will this house deal with the extremely urgent and critical matters which now lie before us, including a simple amendment to the National Housing Act which will reduce the down payment on homes for thousands of Canadians.