

The Address—Mr. S. Knowles

At this time we are thinking in terms of national purpose. We are disturbed about what is happening in the fabric of our lives. We are particularly concerned over the assassination Saturday night. It must not be in vain. The ideals to which Mr. Laporte dedicated his life must be carried on. I submit that we should include in those ideals the new attitudes and new scale of values referred to in the Speech from the Throne. That new scale of values must not be just a few more dollars for the poor and a few thousand dollars more for those at the top, but a society in which the first principle is that everyone in Canada is guaranteed a decent livelihood as a natural right.

Having emphasized the fact that we may achieve our goal faster than some people think, I now wish to mention one subject in particular and two or three other subjects in passing. Because it takes time to achieve a broad ideal like that is no reason that while we are seeking to attain it that we should not look carefully at what we can do along the way.

I welcome the fact that in the course of this session a standing committee will study the white paper on unemployment insurance. I do not think for a moment, and neither does the government, that unemployment insurance is the answer to poverty or that it achieves the justice and dignity that are our destiny. However, it is a step in that direction. I welcome the changes that were made last session in connection with the pensions of retired civil servants, retired members of the armed forces, retired members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and others receiving federal pensions. I also welcome the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications that the same be done for the Canadian National pensioners. I welcome the veterans legislation that has been promised for the present session. I wish we had more details as to what will be in that legislation, and I hope it will contain more than the administrative changes that were called for by the Woods Report. I hope that there will be a scaling up of the pensions paid under the Pension Act and that there will be something for those who receive war veterans allowances. The point I am making, Mr. Speaker, is that these are ideals we want to see carried through in the final achievement. There are some who want to see a guaranteed income for all our people. I recognize that we have to take certain steps along the way, and I welcome those steps which have been taken recently or that are being contemplated at present.

● (3:20 p.m.)

This brings me to another phase of the matter, namely, the whole question of old age security to which I made a passing reference moments ago. I confess that in this area I have a great deal of concern. We were told a couple of years ago about the studies being made by Dr. Willard, the deputy minister of welfare in the Department of National Health and Welfare. For a while we thought we were to see Dr. Willard's report; it is now obvious that we will not see it. Then there was a white paper on pensions, which apparently was based on the Willard report. For a while it seemed that we were to see it in

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the last session. That commitment was not kept. Now, we are told that another white paper is to be produced in the present session which will be different in some respects from the white paper that we did not see during the last session. Until one sees the white paper, and until one sees the legislation to be brought in, one cannot know what is coming.

I confess that I am terribly worried that euphemism has taken over and that we are to get selectivity as the basis of dealing with the pensions of our senior citizens. I say that euphemism has taken over, because I think that is all it is. When you talk about selectivity you are talking about a pension based on some kind of means test or income test. We have been over this argument a good many times, Mr. Speaker. The point I want to make is that it is not consistent with the principles I have been advocating, namely, that a guaranteed livelihood, or a guaranteed income for the people of this country should be a natural right, should be the right of every one of our people.

It is still my view that one of the greatest steps taken in the years I have been in the House, and certainly the greatest step in the field of social security, was that step taken in 1950, in 1951 and in 1952—in one year the matter was before the committee, the next year we had legislation and the year after that the legislation was put into effect—by which we abolished the means test from the former old age pension and by which we said to the group of people of this country who were 70 years of age and over, "Nothing else matters; you are now 70 years of age, and this kind of pension is yours as of right."

The pension was only \$40 then, but the universal basis on which it was paid was a tremendous victory for the concept of natural right in this field. We raised the pension from \$40 to \$46; then to \$55; then to \$65, and then to \$75. The \$75 in relative terms now is not much better than the \$40 was in 1952 or the \$20 was back in 1927. However, during the years when we were raising the pension from \$40 to \$75 we did not do anything to alter the principle under which it was paid. It was given to our people of 70 years of age and over as a matter of right. Later on, thank heaven, we got the age down to 65, and that is where it stands now. I still think, Mr. Speaker, that paying a pension of \$75 a month to every citizen in Canada over the age of 65 as a matter of right is one of the best things we have put on our statute books. It is the kind of beginning toward the sort of society the Speech from the Throne anticipates that we must not go back on.

The reason I am speaking, the reason I am making this plea at this time, is that I am afraid that the government will bring in an increase, not in the basic pension, which is \$75 a month before you add the 2 per cent bonuses, but rather in what the government calls the guaranteed income supplement. I know all the language in favour of it. I know of all the talk about using our money to give it to those who need it. But if you do that, Mr. Speaker, you are doing the very thing that I said at the beginning of my speech will not work. You do not solve poverty by doing things for the poor and leaving them poor; you do not solve poverty by singling out a particular group,