

Supply

middle of last year, when an election was in the offing, pension increases were made retroactive, so that precedent has been established. I think that should be done now. Many senior citizens have already had their rents increased because the news is there will be a pension increase. They need a retroactive payment in order to cover some of the increases they have already had to pay.

On another occasion I will have something more to say about retired civil servants, veterans and those who receive pensions from the private sector. It is appropriate to mention these matters here because this is where the lead must come from, from my good and earnest friend, the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

I also remind the minister that every time we have done something about old age pensions in recent years, we have overlooked certain other things that ought to be done. It used to be that whenever there was an increase in old age security, shortly thereafter there was an increase in old age assistance. There was also an increase in the blind persons allowance and the disabled persons allowance. Those ceilings are still at \$75 even though the Old Age Security pension has been increased to \$82.88. The government argues that those are federal-provincial schemes and that the provinces have the right under the Canada Assistance Plan to supplement them if they want.

However, I have the terrible feeling that in this change, the blind people of Canada have been forgotten in this place. It is not good enough to say to them that a pension of \$75 for a blind person is enough because he can get additional so-called welfare that is financed under the Canada Assistance Plan. I agree with those who speak for the blind that they ought to be paid a universal pension as of right, and that the amount ought to be adequate. Likewise with the question of disabled persons allowances. I know some people are covered under the Canada Assistance Plan, and that some people get disability benefits under the Canada Pension Plan.

• (1430)

However, that old disabled persons act is still around, and we still run into people who encounter difficulty getting pensions or allowances to which they are fully entitled because they are not able to prove they are totally incapacitated. We often run into cases where it seems that to get a pension or an allowance under this legislation a person has to be unable to move, unable to feed or look after himself.

I welcome the proposal in the Speech from the Throne to make a beginning on a guaranteed annual income. Although I want to see the day come when it is universal, I am prepared to start with a guaranteed annual income for certain categories of people, namely the categories mentioned in the Speech from the Throne. Mr. Speaker, let us not anticipate that this will not come about until after another election or another two elections. This is needed now. It is one of the reasons this parliament is being kept here at all—so that action will be taken on these various things. And I plead that this action take place without delay.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nielsen: How long are you going to wait?

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): The hon. member asks his political question, and I don't mind it. We are asking ourselves how long we should give these people to come through with what they themselves have promised. As for the pension, we think it should be \$150 a month. I suppose they will not go that high. We think the age qualification should be lowered.

The important thing is that the older people of Canada are feeling the pinch; they are feeling it even more today because they have been told what has happened to the cost of living index and they are wondering what parliament intends to do. It would be a real boost to them if the news tomorrow is that there has been filed on the notice paper of the House of Commons an appropriate bill to amend the Old Age Security Act. I have enjoyed saying nice things about the Minister of National Health and Welfare and I think he knows I meant them. I would mean them all the more if he would do as I have suggested—file notice of that bill this afternoon so that tomorrow the older people of Canada might know that their pensions are to be increased on a certain date to a much more reasonable level. This is the sort of thing which should be done without delay.

Mr. Nielsen: May I ask the hon. member a question? If the government does not bring in the legislation requested by the hon. member on Monday, would he and his party vote against the appropriation bill on Monday, amounting to expressing non-confidence in the government?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I would be much more interested in answering that question if it had come from a representative of a party which had taken a firm stand with respect to old age pensions.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) was asked during the election campaign whether he would support the payment of \$150 a month across the board as a basic old age pension. And he said, no.

An hon. Member: He said \$175.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): He said no such thing. When he was pressed as to how much of an increase he would support, he said: Enough to cover the full cost of living. The highest figure that was ever extracted from the Leader of the Opposition in the election campaign was the figure of \$10 a month.

An hon. Member: Answer the question!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Now, why should we throw the Liberals out when we are still trying to get \$150, or something like it, from them, while from this side of the House we have no promise at all? Two or three Sundays ago, the Leader of the Opposition was on one of those afternoon television programs and the question was put to him again. He dodged it. He was not prepared to commit his party to an increase in the basic old age pension beyond \$10 a month. He and his friends