

Family Allowances

● (1520)

Then there is the question raised by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), the important question of which index is to apply. We must consider whether it is simply to be the cost of living index or whether we should move on to other indices or aspects of the cost of living index which would bring greater justice to public servants. We have to consider afresh the whole subject of working conditions. We must consider, as we go ahead, the wisdom or otherwise of the manner in which the superannuation account is administered, as acknowledged by the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) yesterday. I believe there is a certain amount of discontent, a feeling that there is great room for improvement in the administration of this account. This will be the challenge before parliament in the years to come.

The government has met in part, the challenge which faces it now, but I suggest it did so with some reluctance and only after a tremendous amount of urging by those of us who have been interested in public service matters over the years. The Liberal member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Poulin) stated in the course of his remarks that we would all support this overdue increase. There is no question that it is overdue. There is no question that every member of the House wholeheartedly supports this bill on third reading.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, when this bill was being considered in committee yesterday afternoon I suggested that any further debate would really be a case of wrapping it in fancy paper and tying it with a bow ribbon. The fact of the matter is that it is a good piece of legislation. We welcome it, and are glad it is being passed by this parliament.

Some of us have been concerned about this matter for many years, in fact, for decades. I well recall the historic step which was taken at the end of 1969 and early in 1970 when provision was first made for the pensions of retired public servants and other government employees to be escalated after retirement. That was, as I say, a historic step, but there were two or three major deficiencies in the bill which was passed in 1970. What we are doing now is to correct those deficiencies.

The corrections are mainly two. We are providing that the pensions of retired public servants and the other related groups shall be escalated each year, not just by 2 per cent but by the total percentage increase in the cost of living. This is good. This is welcome news to the nearly 100,000 people who are affected by this legislation. The other change is to lower slightly and under certain conditions the age at which escalation can begin in the case of retired RCMP and retired armed forces personnel. This change does not go far enough, but as far as it goes it is most welcome.

As the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) has said, this is not the end of the road as far as public service matters generally are concerned. I underline the various points he has made touching other subjects which ought to be dealt with. But I also emphasize, even as one who has supported this legislation and who supports it today, that this bill is not even the end of the road as far as public service pensions are concerned.

Within a few weeks, or within a few months at most, when we have passed proposed amendments to the Canada Pension Plan, we will just about have done the job of providing for all pensions that come under federal auspices to be escalated at least annually by the full extent of the cost of living increase. But we must move on from that. Merely to get one's pension escalated in step with the cost of living increase is simply a case of being permitted to continue to enjoy only that total amount of goods and services that one enjoyed at retirement. But society moves on. Wage levels move up and the standard of living goes up. Some of us feel that we must now start to think of escalating pensions in accordance with the rise in wage and salary levels and in accordance with the rise in the gross national product.

One of the good things about coming to the end of a crusade is that it gives one a chance to begin a new one. We welcome this bill. We welcome what it means not only to the nearly 100,000 persons it affects, but in principle to all Canadians. But now is the time to look forward to the escalation of pensions on still a better index so that our retired people, public servants and all our citizens, will have the right to enjoy not only enough to keep alive, not only enough to keep up with the cost of living, but the opportunity to share in the increases in the standard of living which society is able to achieve, which to a large extent has been made possible by our older people. With pleasure, we support this bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa East): Mr. Speaker, if I have not joined in this discussion it is simply because I support this bill without reservation and because, as an Ottawa resident, I am most pleased to see this government legislation about to be passed.

[*English*]

Motion agreed to and bill read the third time and passed.

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FAMILY ALLOWANCES ACT AND YOUTH ALLOWANCES ACT

AMENDMENTS TO INCREASE PAYMENTS

The House resumed, from Tuesday, September 11, consideration of the motion of Mr. Lalonde that Bill C-223, to amend the Family Allowances Act and the Youth Allowances Act, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs.

Mr. Sinclair Stevens (York-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, when I was speaking on Bill C-223 last evening I was unfortunately interrupted by an intentional interjection by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde), who to me was attempting to cut off my complete freedom to speak on this bill as I saw fit. It is interesting to note that when the bill was introduced by the minister to whom I have referred, he was not interrupted once. Yet in his presentation he referred to inflation, the cost of living, and made other references in