

*The Address—Mr. S. Knowles*

cent pension, and certainly no widows' pensions should be less than we provide for our own widows.

However, I am questioning even that limit of 60 per cent. Surely, when a pension is earned and the husband and wife have been a team, it is their pension. Just because one dies first rather than the other should not result in a different rate of pension. I submit, therefore, that whatever pension is paid to the pensioner himself, let us say the husband, that same rate of pension should be continued to the widow.

When members opposite talk about ending discrimination against women, I suggest that they talk about ending this problem. I suggest it is no longer fair in an age in which we talk about equality to carry on this kind of discrimination against widows. Again, I am conscious of the mail I receive every week and of the scores of cases of which I know personally involving widows who are left with 50 per cent of what the husband's pension was and who find, especially with today's rising costs, that they have to upset their whole way of life because of that reduction. On the other hand, if the wife dies first the widower carries the full pension and can ride along just as he did before. I submit that this is a correction which needs to be made in the whole area of public service pensions where the federal government is in control. It should be made in other places as well, but surely where the federal government has control is the place to start.

I move on now to say a few words about railway pensions. In the main I have to talk in this chamber about Canadian National pensions because the Canadian National is ostensibly owned by us, although I think the Canadian Pacific has just as much responsibility to the public as the Canadian National in consideration of what we have done for that railway over the last century or so. I therefore wish to talk about railway pensions.

Last summer, as hon. members will recall, there was a dispute as a result of which we spent a few days of special sittings in parliament and passed legislation putting the workers back to work. One of the issues in the dispute was that of pensions, and when Mr. Justice Hall was appointed as arbitrator on the wage issue a side appointment was made, namely that of Dr. John Deutsch as a commissioner to inquire into the pension question. We knew then very clearly the limits of Dr. Deutsch's commission. All he was empowered to do was to assess the percentage value of the pension changes which had been won in the negotiations in relation to the total wage package. He had no authority to review railway pensions as a whole and he had no authority to improve the position of retired railway workers already drawing their pensions. A great many of these people took hope in the thought that since a famous man like, Dr. John Deutsch had been appointed the commissioner dealing with railway pensions, something would be done about those pensions. I have had to write scores of retired railway workers defending Dr. Deutsch, pointing out that this was not his commission, and that all he had the right to do was make that one very narrow judgment.

● (2110)

During the course of that debate last summer the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) admitted that the assignment given Dr. Deutsch was a very narrow one. He said that at

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an early date he would appoint another commission to go into the broad question of railway pensions, in all their aspects.

A few days or weeks ago in Edmonton the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) repeated that promise, but we are still waiting for this to be implemented. I implore the Minister of Labour not to delay any longer. As a matter of fact, Canadian National retired workers for a number of years have had a 2 per cent increase each year but have not even had that for 1974, and nor is there any sign of it. All other government pensions are now being escalated by the full extent of the cost of living increase and railway workers should get that as well; yet so far in 1974 they have not had any sign of any escalation at all. It is a crime that these employees are having to wait to find out what is going to happen. They have been left out and forgotten, and I call upon the government to face up to this issue and deal with it just as soon as it possibly can.

Another area of pensions that this parliament must deal with is the whole question of how private pensions operate. Far too many of them fall short, and most of them fail on the important point of escalating pensions after retirement. I insist that the Pension Benefits Standards Act be amended in many respects, and one of the things that is required is that every pension plan have in it provisions for the escalation of pensions after retirement. There must be further provisions to make sure that pension funds are safe and that people get value for what they put into them. As a matter of fact, the day may well come when these private pensions will have not only to be integrated and made portable, but brought more directly under the aegis of the federal government.

More and more individuals are realizing the shortcomings of private plans. I am amazed, at some of the people who have spoken to me, people who do not have any interest in my particular political philosophy, and who have said to me: "Stanley, why don't you speak up for an improvement in our private pensions plans?" I certainly do, and I think this is an issue with which this parliament must deal.

I should like to say a few words about another area of pensions, and I refer in this instance to war veterans. Here too we did fairly well in 1973, though not enough to jump for joy, boast and all of that, particularly when one considers the sacrifices which were made and the fact that we are falling a long way short of the promises made to these Canadians. However, we did improve the basic pension for the disabled under the Pension Act, and we did make improvements in the War Veterans Allowance Act.

However, as an example of something I think is most unfair, I draw attention to the treatment which has just recently been accorded recipients of war veterans allowances who are 65 years of age or over. As hon. members know, war veterans allowances, like disability pensions under the Pension Act, are now escalated annually by the full percentage increase in the cost of living, and that increase takes place in January. Hon. members also know that old age security and the guaranteed income supplement are escalated by the full percentage increase in the cost of living, but that escalation takes place every three months.