

Interim Supply

The Chairman: Shall the resolution carry?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Chairman, the Minister of National Health and Welfare is not incapable of speaking. He has just as much right to speak as has the Minister of Finance or anyone else. Surely he can take the floor and answer the questions we have put.

Mr. Monteith: Mr. Chairman, if I may just interject a word, may I say this. The former minister of national health and welfare this afternoon prefaced his questions to me by a statement to the effect that if I were not prepared to answer this whole question in detail he would be delighted if I would answer at some time in the future. I trust the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre will view the whole picture in somewhat the same light. I have not been in office so very long. I am studying the whole matter of hospital insurance in great detail and before too long I hope to be able to make a complete statement.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): In view of what the Minister of National Health and Welfare has said, I think the house would find it desirable to recognize the fact that it can afford to be generous in this particular instance,—

Mr. Monteith: I am not asking for generosity.

Mr. Bell (Carleton): No generosity is needed.

Mr. Martin (Essex East):—not because of what the Minister of Finance has said but because of what the Minister of National Health and Welfare has said just now. I think it is understandable that a man who takes on the heavy responsibility of Minister of National Health and Welfare should have the opportunity, if he finds that he is not in a position to answer in detail, to postpone his answer. I think the significant thing is not so much the reply that we have just received but the fact that it has taken so long in the course of this debate for this observation to have been made.

Mr. Fulton: There is too much nonsense being talked on the other side of the house. That is the main reason why it could not be made before.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): One reason is the attitude of the Minister of Finance who told the Minister of Transport today, who was about to reply, "Do not make a reply; I do not want any replies at this time".

Mr. Bell (Carleton): Why do you not vote against the resolution?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): That is what we should object to in this house and that is what we are objecting to.

There is no objection to the attitude taken by the Minister of National Health and Welfare but one could have expected that answer to have been given much earlier. Let it not be forgotten that the hon. gentleman who looks at me in such comfort and ease—the Minister Finance—has given an example today of the new form of closure which this government is going to impose on parliament.

Mr. Fleming: That is utter rot and nonsense.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): The member for Essex East can, of course, speak for himself, but it does seem to me that at least some of the questions which were asked today could be answered by the Minister of National Health and Welfare. Surely he knows whether any effort has been made since he assumed his portfolio to have any of the six provinces sign an agreement. That is not a matter for study, that is a matter of fact. Surely he knows whether a master agreement has been prepared; surely he knows whether he has made any effort to get any of the other four provinces to agree. It would seem to me appropriate to have a more elucidating answer than we have had thus far, but if all the minister can do is ask for more time then I suppose we will have to give it to him.

I wonder if the Minister of Finance will permit himself to make a more complete answer to the questions which have been asked about superannuated civil servants. As he knows, when he and his colleagues were on this side of the chamber they were second to none in their insistence that something be done for the retired civil servants whose pensions are in the lower and middle brackets. This applies particularly in the case of the hon. gentleman's colleague in the cabinet, the Minister of Public Works.

We thought last spring that at long last we had made some headway and that we were getting some action on this matter from the former government, in which the Hon. Walter Harris was minister of finance. The last words we had on this subject, which I believe were in answer to the questions of the member for Fort William, gave us hope that something would indeed be done. That government went out of office without dealing with this matter after all. Now when the new government is in power, composed of members who supported the idea that the position of these people should be improved, all we get is the same answer that we got from Mr. Ilsley and Mr. Abbott and Mr. Harris—"The matter is under consideration."