

in this House or in the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs, there was wide support for the idea that the time had come to bring down the pension age. Whether we do it all at once or whether we do it a year at a time is open for discussion, but it is important that we get started.

I am disappointed with one of my favourite ministers. There are not very many over there whom I can call favourites, but there is one for whom I have a good deal of fondness and respect, the Minister of National Health and Welfare. I deeply regret the statements he has been making that suggest that nothing can be done in that area at this time. I recognize the validity of his contention that there are other areas that have to be attended to as well and that we must deal with the problem of the inadequate income of the working poor, and I am glad the minister is meeting with his counterparts in the provinces to grapple with that issue.

I am proud of the fact that in my province of Manitoba, under the joint auspices of the federal and provincial governments, an experiment is being undertaken with regard to a guaranteed annual income directed toward this very goal of improving the income status of those who are working but whose incomes from their employment are inadequate.

The readiness to face up to that problem, however, is no excuse for trying to slough off the other one, namely the problem of getting the pension age down to 60. I know it is not very long ago that the pension age was 70. I can remember that in my first speeches of this House, more than three decades ago, I argued that the pension age should be brought down to 65. Some people will ask "Are you never satisfied?" That is a good question. They know the answer.

● (2100)

The point I make is that as conditions have changed, the rat race of industrial life and economic struggle is such that there are all kinds of people—they write me every day of the week—who find it almost impossible to keep going physically, to make ends meet until they are 65, and my mail every day contains urgent pleas that I use my voice in this House of Commons to get pensions payable at age 60.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I insist, Mr. Speaker, that this is a goal toward which we must work and it must apply to both the Old Age Security Act and the Canada Pension Plan. I am prepared—indeed I have advocated it in the past and I so advocate it in the resolution to which I have referred—, to make pensions payable under the two pieces of legislation I have mentioned between the ages of 60 and 65, only to those who are out of or who leave the labour market. We should be prepared to apply an employment test similar to the one we provided under the Canada Pension Plan for those aged between 65 and 69 but which is very shortly to be removed from that age bracket. I submit it would be a decent and humane response to the pleas we are receiving from all over the country to say to persons who are out of the labour market or who are prepared to leave it that they can draw the full

The Address—Mr. S. Knowles

old age security pension at any time after the age of 60 and that they can draw that portion of the Canada Pension Plan they have earned up to that age at any time after age 60.

I have a great many interests in the field of pensions and I intend to speak to as many of them as time will permit tonight. I think I place the two suggestions I have just laid before the House, raising substantially the amount of the basic old age pension—I suggest \$200 a month across the board—and lowering the pension age, at the top of the list. I say to my good friend the Minister of National Health and Welfare, and I say to the members of cabinet as well as to all members in all parts of the House, that this issue will not go away. Just as I was sure many years ago, when I started out arguing for the removal of the means test, when I argued in favour of raising the amount of the pension and for lowering the age requirement, that we would win those battles, I am equally sure we will win these two battles for a higher amount and for 60 to be the pension age.

But let it not be necessary for some of us to fight for another 30 years to win these things. They are possible of achievement now, and they should be brought into effect right away. So, Mr. Speaker, I call upon members to give serious and favourable consideration to the proposition that I am placing before the House and to the motion which will appear on the order paper in a few days' time for amendments to these two statutes, the Old Age Security Act and the Canada Pension Plan, raising the basic amount of the old age pension to \$200 a month, and lowering the qualifying pension age under both pieces of legislation to 60, on a voluntary basis so far as each individual is concerned.

I move on to say that I think there are further improvements which should be made with regard to the pensions of retired public servants, retired members of the Armed Forces, retired R.C.M.P. personnel and others. We have made improvements in this area quite dramatically in the last few years. It was a good move we undertook last year in removing the 2 per cent ceiling from the escalation clauses so that the pensions now rise every year to meet the full amount of the cost of living increase. But, as with other pensions, that escalation is delayed. It is assessed only once a year. It can be 10 or 11 months behind the time the cost of living starts to go up. There are the difficulties faced by retired R.C.M.P. and Armed Forces personnel arising from the fact that the escalation does not start until age 60 except in certain special cases. I think those difficulties should be resolved.

I wish to use these few minutes I am devoting to retired public servants, retired R.C.M.P. and Armed Forces personnel and others to highlight an issue which applies to these groups and which also applies to all pension groups. That is the question of the amount of pensions paid to widows. We have accepted for years, for decades, that somehow a pension belongs to the man and that he should get 100 per cent of it. If his wife dies he carries on to draw the 100 per cent. However, if he dies first we think we are being generous to accord a 50 per cent pension to the widow. In the case of Members of Parliament we have done a little better. We have provided them with a 60 per