

The Address—Mr. S. Knowles

feel that I can make this plea with some feeling of hope because the minister indicated yesterday that discussions are going on with the provinces about ways in which to improve the Canada Pension Plan. The Quebec government has already put the spurs to the federal government by making improvement in the Quebec plan with the result that its benefits are now better than those under the Canada Pension Plan.

I know that federal-provincial discussions are involved and this sort of thing can take time, but such discussion should not take too much time. I submit that one thing that can be done right away is to remove the 2 per cent ceiling from the annual escalation of pensions under the Canada Pension Plan. It should at least be put on a basis equal to that which now applies in the case of old age security, both the basic pension and the supplement. As I say, Mr. Speaker, many improvements can be made to the Canada Pension Plan and the government will have our co-operation in trying to get these improvements through. But right away let us have the removal of the 2 per cent ceiling on the annual escalation of all the benefits under that plan.

I turn now to another area, that of the pensions of retired public servants, including retired armed forces personnel, retired RCMP personnel and the many other categories that come under that general heading of retired public servants. That legislation also needs to be improved, and one of the first improvements that ought to be made—in fact I was hoping that the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) would have announced it before now—is to remove the 2 per cent ceiling on the annual escalation.

In the last session of the last parliament the President of the Treasury Board assured me that this would be given consideration. I believe there have been discussions between the government and the staff associations, but nothing seems to have come of those discussions. Time is going on and nothing is being done. Mr. Speaker, it is utterly ridiculous for some pensions to be subject to escalation, at least to the extent that the cost of living goes up, but that other pensions, like those received by retired public servants, are limited to an annual escalation rate of 2 per cent.

May I remind the minister that there are improvements that need to be made with respect to the provisions for early retirement and that something should be done to remove the discrimination against retired members of the RCMP and armed forces personnel. They have to wait until age 60 to get their annual escalation even though, under the most recent legislation, it is possible for certain retired public servants who are under age 60 to get the annual escalation.

The formula respecting the Public Service Superannuation Act also needs to be improved. I think that we as members of this House should not be content with provisions in acts such as those which apply to retired public servants that provide for their widows a pension of only 50 per cent of what the pension of the public servant himself would have been, when in the case of Members of Parliament the pension for the widow is 60 per cent. In my view, the pension for the widow of the public servant should be a lot higher, for the first year or two anyway.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

But there is no defence for providing a 60 per cent pension for our own widows and only 50 per cent for widows of retired public servants.

Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the ear and the attention of the President of the Treasury Board. I know he is concerned about these matters, but I ask him to adopt the same attitude as his new colleague, the Minister of National Health and Welfare. He should admit that the pensions we are asking for are justified because, somehow or other, there has been a change in this parliament; somehow or other there is no longer in this House a situation in which an arrogant government with an overpowering majority can just say no. We have a government that is interested, as it has to be, in the views across the aisle. I can tell the minister that the views in this part of the House across the aisle are very strong with respect to these pension matters, and we feel that they should be improved right across the board.

• (1550)

I turn now to another facet of the pension question. Just as I was sorry that the Minister of Transport did not deal with matters coming under his purview this morning, so I am sorry that he is not here this afternoon. Whether his presence would make any difference, I do not know. I know, however, that the minister should face the seriousness of the situation regarding pensions affecting employees of Canadian National Railways.

Mr. Benjamin: And of the CPR.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): If he does not know it now, he had better face up to the fact that there is a good deal of ferment among Canadian National personnel, both active and retired, about their pension plan. This ferment is evident in a number of areas. However, first, if I may, I wish to speak about those who are retired. There is real concern that the escalation of pensions for those who have retired has not been put on a permanent basis. Pensions have been escalated twice on an ad hoc basis for retired railway workers. In the case of retired public servants, the escalation is now a permanent arrangement. Canadian National pensioners and employees feel that the escalation of Canadian National Pensions after retirement should be put on a permanent basis. They also feel that there should not be a 2 per cent limit to that escalation, the limit imposed in the two ad hoc escalations that have thus far taken place. I think many things need to be done to bring the Canadian National pension arrangements into conformity with what the employees and pensioners feel they are entitled to.

There are some things that ought to be done without delay. The first thing that could be done next week would be to provide for the escalation of CNR pensions to be put on an annual basis and for that escalation to be based at least on actual increases in the cost of living rather than on any 2 per cent ceiling. Every time you hear me making reference to escalating pensions on a basis at least equal to the rise in the cost of living, you will hear me use those words "at least". So far as I am concerned, even that is not good enough, because the result, as I have already said, is that pensioners are always forced to lag behind.