

Pension Act

discussion and control from the floor of the House of Commons and vesting it in the executive arm of government. That process has been described as the "passing of parliament" by authorities on our parliamentary process and procedure. That is the reason why I oppose what has been described by government members on the committee as a small attempt to shift the governmental centre of gravity from the floor of the house and place it in the hands of the executive.

This issue in some respects reminds me of a struggle which took place in this house shortly after I first came to parliament when a seemingly innocuous bill was introduced by the then minister of public works which, if carried, would have interfered with the principle of tendering for government contracts. A great outcry arose from all sides of the house with the result that the bill was defeated in a resounding fashion. It is my hope that as a result of this renewed discussion on the floor of the house tonight all hon. members will take a firm stand against any further invasion of the sovereign rights of parliament, because in the long run it is not the large issues which have brought us to this sorry pass, as far as parliamentary procedure is concerned, but the small nibbling away at our parliamentary processes.

This has been said before but I repeat it now. The only argument which has been advanced in defence of this measure, and it was done in a halfhearted and feeble fashion by those spokesmen on the government side who usually tackle points of discussion with vigour and enthusiasm, was that of administrative efficiency and, in other words, the streamlining of the parliamentary process. If that is the objective why not do away with parliamentary discussion altogether? The basis of our democratic parliamentary system is the public discussion of important issues. Because of that fact, Mr. Chairman, I would very strongly urge hon. members of this house to adhere to the same principle in regard to the control of the salary of the members of the pension board as that which applies to the judiciary in Canada at the present time; for this board, as has already been pointed out, is more or less a semi-judicial body.

Mr. MacInnis: Mr. Chairman, I very seldom take any part in a debate on veterans affairs because in this group we have a number of members who make a study of veterans legislation and bills of this kind are usually left to them to our entire satisfaction. I am not speaking now because I am not satisfied with what has been said on this matter by the hon. member for Cape Breton South; I am merely supporting the position he has taken.

[Mr. Dinsdale.]

From the moment I saw this provision in the bill when it was first introduced in the house I felt it was a proposal that should be opposed by every hon. member in this house who has any concern for the freedom of members of parliament and for increasing the influence of parliament in our life. I think it is a most dangerous thing to have a body such as the pension commission have its salary set without reference to this house. I have had considerable dealings with the pension commission at various times and always of a satisfactory nature. By that I do not mean that they were always able to provide a satisfactory solution to the problems I put before them, but I am quite sure they provided a satisfactory solution in so far as they were able to do so within the ambit of the legislation. But now we are not to be allowed to have some say on the salary of the commission members. That being the case I do not see how we can have any say in setting the salaries for other commissions. I would urge the government not to force this bill through the house on a majority vote. That would be doing violence to the constitution of this house.

Such bills, as an hon. member said over here a few moments ago, do not come up every year or several times a year. Increases in salary, or decreases—and that might happen some time in the future if things keep on going the way they are now—come up only on occasion, and if hon. members do not take a little time to debate the issue then it is not worth while. I would therefore urge the government as strongly as I can to take another look at this matter and leave the act as it was in this respect.

Mr. Montgomery: Mr. Chairman, while there may not be very much to add to the arguments that have been advanced I wish to put myself on record as supporting the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra, the hon. member for Cape Breton South, and others who have spoken. In the last few days I have received several letters from branches of the Canadian Legion in my part of the country inquiring whether I was supporting the Canadian Legion brief. I have had no hesitation in saying that I am supporting their brief, because I am sure what they ask is quite reasonable.

As regards this particular legislation I think the government has advanced a very weak argument by claiming it is not important. If it is not important then why ask us to pass it? I have heard that argument advanced now with respect to several pieces of legislation recently and it seems to me the government should not bring in any legislation which is not important. That was the argument advanced with regard to the