

Statute Law Amendment Act, 1970

Mr. Whicher: But you belong to the same party as Donald MacDonald.

Mr. Lewis: I speak as a Member of the House of Commons. Some members of my party disagree with me. Without accusing anybody of displaying a lesser morality, lesser intelligence or a lesser concern for our country, I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that in my opinion the government is wrong and Parliament will be wrong in approving so substantial a pension for Members of Parliament without doing a single thing to improve the pension plan as a whole of other public servants.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs. Grace MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, a member of the opposition who spoke earlier in the debate congratulated the government for its courage in bringing forward this legislation. Whatever the government displayed, I do not think it was courage. May I refer to what the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald) suggested when he indicated that it was not a matter of great substance that pensions for public servants and Members of Parliament are dealt with in the same bill.

I think it is precisely because the government lacked courage that it introduced these separate measures in the same bill. In other words, the government knew perfectly well that a bill to increase pensions of Members of Parliament and Senators at this time—and it has been emphasized by others that the phrase “at this time” is all-important—would be unpopular with the public and embarrassing for Members of Parliament and Senators; so it decided to bring in under part II of this bill the provisions dealing with pensions of Members of Parliament and Senators. It brought in part II of the bill, which it knew would be unpopular, under the cloak of raising the pensions of civil servants, which it knew would be popular. That is exactly what it did, even though the bases of the two pensions are entirely different and the benefits paid under part II are far more generous than those to be paid to recipients under part I.

I therefore think the President of the Privy Council was quite wrong when he tried to pretend that it was not of great consequence that these two measures should be included in one bill. They were included in one bill quite deliberately, with the hope that the popular part, the pension increases relating to the

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public service, would carry the unpopular part relating to Members of Parliament and Senators.

● (3:30 p.m.)

The campaign to raise pensions of public servants has been fought long and hard by many boards, bodies, commissions, public servants themselves and by people like my colleague for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). Of course, in this campaign my hon. friend from Winnipeg North Centre has played a very consistent and persistent part in this victory which is by no means confined to a few people.

I want to touch on a point with which the President of the Privy Council omitted to deal. He was careful to say that the recommendations are based very largely on the Curtis report. But there is one part of the report with which he did not deal, namely, what appears on page 5. The report recommended that pensions be paid at age 55 on retirement, but not before that age. Mr. Curtis said in his report:

It should also be stated plainly that the present system of paying allowances immediately upon retirement from the House is inequitable in that it gives younger “retirees” a great advantage over older members... The time has come to make the system more adequate, equitable and appropriate to present-day conditions and more in line with pension and retirement plans in general.

In other words, the report recommended that MPs be eligible for pensions henceforth at the age of 55. The government disregarded this advice completely when drawing up the new pensions schedule. So far I have heard no explanation from the government as to why they brushed off this recommendation.

Mr. Peters: The government wants retired members to be young enough to enjoy it.

Mrs. MacInnis: My hon. friend is not on the government side, yet. I said I had heard nothing from the government side. Now I want to touch on one or two points which were made by the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis). I see he has returned to the chamber, and I am glad he has. It seems that when he was worrying about members' pensions and being such a strong advocate of the needs of Members of Parliament, he was doing something which was important and about which he felt very strongly.

But I would just like to suggest—I will come in a minute to the need of Members of Parliament for this pension, and in some