

Government Orders

Mr. Jim Edwards (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to this debate today and at report stage on Friday. I find it extremely informative.

I had the opportunity a few weeks ago to have a public meeting on Public Service issues in my constituency of Edmonton Southwest. Prior to doing so I consulted with Mr. Daryl Bean, the president of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, Iris Craig of the Professional Institute of the Public Service and of course with Mr. John Edwards of PS2000.

My objective was to inform myself on Public Service issues. It became very clear that there was a fair amount of interest and an alarming amount of misinformation about the provisions of Bill C-55. I think the debate and the record of the debate will in some cases have clarified that and in some cases, without naming the sources of the confusion, have confused the issue.

The objective of the bill of course is to bring Public Service and members of Parliament pensions in line with the requirements of the Income Tax Act. That is truly the objective of the bill. There are those, and I do not fault them for their motives, who have sought to have the bill reach out beyond its own capacity to include other areas of operation of pensions, some worthy and some questionable.

The President of the Treasury Board gave an undertaking on Thursday last which I think is a comfort to all Canadians; that is that the whole question of pensions of members of Parliament will be referred to an outside committee for review and recommendations. This move I think is overdue. I am pleased that the President of the Treasury Board has agreed to it at this time. He had given some earlier indications that he would be prepared to do it, but he made the formal undertaking last Thursday.

That will have the effect of sending a message to the Canadian public that we do not think we are above the law or we do not think that we are in a position to always operate without some other input. I have found it interesting that many critics of MPs' pensions who have been stimulated by the ads of the National Citizens' Coalition, which my friend from Glengarry—Prescott—

Russell referred to the other day in debate, have been badly misinformed.

The fact of the matter is that regardless of the merits of that scheme or the lack of merit of the scheme, there is a basic question that remains in the minds of the Canadian public. That is, how is it you folks can deal with these matters on your own without some other input, and how is it that it can happen regardless of the merits?

• (1710)

Mr. Summerville in his ads of course does not point out that the scheme has been in place since 1952 and in its present form since 1972. He seems to indicate it is something that has been foisted recently upon the Canadian public.

Regardless of those facts, the review will begin and all of us, regardless of party and regardless of our approach to the issue, will welcome that review.

The debate is proceeding rather well and I do not propose to intervene much longer other than to move:

That the question be now put.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, the government is at it again. We now have a motion that the question now be put. That prevents any amendment from anyone in this House to be put once this is adopted. The government is imposing closure on pension plans. That is what it is doing. It is trying to prevent the democratic expression of this House on matters of great importance to many of us. I find that absolutely abhorrent.

I see the government Whip laughing. Maybe he will want to speak in this debate. He knows a lot about pension plans and I would like to hear him defend the government on this issue. I know him to be a fair man and being a fair man he will have a hard time defending this legislation.

I want to ask the parliamentary secretary a simple question. Why does this government—and he represents government—exclude itself, exempt itself, from the standards established by the government under the pension benefits standards legislation passed five years ago?

What has the government got against fairness? Why is the government saying to Canadians: Do as I say, not as I do? Why is this parliamentary secretary at this time