

PUBLIC SERVICE—FREEZING OF PENSIONS OF MEMBERS OF
ARMED FORCES AND MOUNTED POLICE UNTIL AGE 60—DENIAL
OF PENSIONS TO CERTAIN WIDOWS—REQUEST FOR REPORT

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, November 19, 1976, as reported in *Hansard* on page 1186, I put a question to the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras) relating to two issues which were unresolved when parliament considered and passed Bill C-52 during the last session. That was a bill which had to do with the many superannuation plans which came under the aegis of the federal government. The question I put to the minister speaks for itself, so I think I shall place it before the House again tonight:

In view of the fact that it is unfair to many retired RCMP and Armed Forces personnel to have their pensions frozen until age 60, will the minister consider this issue? Also, in view of the fact that it is unfair to the widows of many public servants, RCMP, Armed Forces and other personnel not to receive pensions at all because their marriages took place after the date the deceased husband was put on pension, will the minister consider this issue, and indeed, does he plan to make a report to the House on both these issues as soon as possible?

● (2200)

The President of the Treasury Board was very considerate in his reply. He took note of the two issues—indeed, he said he was already aware of them—and said he hoped within a reasonable time to be able to say something about them. I welcome his presence here tonight and I hope he will have a favourable response.

May I say a word with respect to the first issue, that of the indexing of the pensions of retired RCMP and Armed Forces personnel. When the indexing of pensions of federal employees was first brought in and fixed at age 60, it did not seem completely unreasonable to apply that age to these two groups as well. But later on an arrangement was made whereby some public servants could get the indexing of their pensions at age 55, and that being the case it seems to me that the position of retired RCMP and Armed Forces personnel has to be reconsidered. There are persons who complete their term of duty, who are retired at a time when it is difficult to pick up other employment, and to have their pensions frozen when pensions of other persons who work for the government are being escalated seems to me to be quite unfair.

We have been over the arguments many times. My concern tonight is not to take time to restate the arguments but to hear what the minister has to say.

The other point which I raised as a leftover from the last session has to do with the case of widows of all the various categories that I named where the marriage took place after the retired employee concerned went on the pension. I had something to say about this the other day during the debate on human rights when we were discussing equality between men and women. It seems to me that there is something basically unfair between widows when in the one case a widow gets the pension and in the other case she does not. Sometimes the marriage in the second case lasted longer than in the first case. Again there are arguments both ways, and we have been over them many times. My concern is that this unfairness be rectified.

Adjournment Debate

I recognize, Mr. Speaker, that I am raising this issue at a time when there are some persons in the country, some agencies and newspapers, who are campaigning against the indexing of public service pensions at all. I regard that as irresponsible. What is wrong today is not that only the pensions of some persons are indexed; what is wrong is that indexing of pensions has not been extended to everyone.

In my view the campaign against the indexing of public service pensions is just an attempt on the part of certain private employers and financial interests to fend off the day when they will have to do it too. I suggest that there is real merit in the statement made by Dr. Noel Hall in his report on railway pensions to the effect that unless private pension plans can meet this issue of keeping pension plans up to date with the cost of living, they will find that they do not fill the bill, and their place will have to be taken by a wider use of pensions, such as the Canada Pension Plan. However, we are not discussing that issue tonight—unless the minister wants to make a definitive announcement on it.

I should like to hear from the minister on the question of pensions of retired Armed Forces and RCMP personnel, from the time they retire until they reach age 60, and on the position of widows of the category that I have described. I thank the minister for being here tonight and I look forward eagerly to what he has to say.

Hon. Robert K. Andras (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the hon. member has indicated his non-support for Mr. Colin Brown and people like him and their attitude toward indexed pensions. I did give some indication to the hon. member, as did my predecessor, that his views would be given full consideration. The situation is the same as it was when I replied in November.

As the hon. member knows, there is considerable interest in the whole question of indexed pensions. I stated in this House, I believe in December—and I confirm my statement—that I was interested in commissioning an independent actuarial analysis of the indexing of federal employee pension plans to test, check, and confirm the information. We now have to satisfy, I believe, the concerns being expressed by certain people, and I have to say that until we get that confirmation or the results of that and certain other studies which are under way related more to the private pension sector, namely, the studies being undertaken by the Department of Finance and the Department of National Health and Welfare, it is not our intention to make moves, at least for a few months.

With regard to the situation particularly associated with the Armed Forces and the RCMP issue which the hon. member raised, the hon. member may recall that during consideration of the Statute Law, (Superannuation) Amendment Act early last year by the Joint Committee of the House of Commons and the Senate on Employer-Employee Relations in the Public Service a number of requests were made for changes and improvements in the survivor benefits payable under the Superannuation Acts to spouses of public servants and members of the Armed Forces and the RCMP.