

advancement of our society, we do so with all our energies, in the prime of our life.

So, this is food for thought at this important time when members of Parliament devote time and energy to the state and to social development.

• (1635)

I would add that a political career often interrupts a person's significant contributions to existing pension plans. That is why we must provide members with benefits that are at least as good as those they left behind. It is a matter of fairness. We are not saying that members must be paid handsomely and receive endless benefits. Members must not come here feeling that they will hit the jackpot in four or six years with a good pension whatever their age, that they will be happy to take people's money. That is not what we are talking about here. We are talking about important elements in members' lives.

Before coming here, all members of this House already had their own careers in the private sector or in business, industry, professional services, education, health, etc. They had their own lives but they decided to get involved in politics, the vast majority of them, I am sure, to make a contribution to and benefit society through a political party by participating in the legislative and public administration process. Their previous lives, careers and pension contributions cannot be dismissed out of hand. They should in fairness be taken into consideration.

For all the reasons I just listed, the Official Opposition urges all members to continue to work on pension reform without overlooking any of these elements. In conclusion, I reiterate that we are opposed to this motion as long as the alignment of pensions on private sector plans does not take into account all the elements I referred to earlier involving members' responsibilities, precarious position and previous entitlements. Pensions cannot simply be aligned on the private sector as if by magic; a comprehensive review and clear reference points are needed.

Of course, the Official Opposition rejects this motion but urges everyone to continue working on pension reform, keeping in mind the two important factors we recognize. First, the age at which members can collect pensions. We do not feel that pensions are a privilege to which we are entitled at any age in defiance of societal norms. That is something we recognize. Second, the issue of multiple pensions. We find it unacceptable that someone can retire from a job and receive a pension, then turn around and get rehired. We are against this practice. In our opinion, these two elements should be an important part of pension reform. To achieve a truly comprehensive pension reform that is fair to all elected officials, be they men or women, we need a very clear guide to the fairness criteria leading to a real reform.

Supply

[English]

Mr. Alex Shepherd (Durham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his dissertation. I know he spent a lot of time talking about financial independence and the importance of financial independence for members of Parliament.

I wonder how he reconciles that. We have heard a lot in this House about independence for the province from which he is from. I just wonder how he reconciles those two things, the independence of a member of Parliament, the independence to receive money from the Government of Canada on the one hand and on the other hand that somehow we do not need Canada for any other purpose. How is it possible that the Government of Canada is good enough to receive a pension from but not continually tax the people of Quebec?

[Translation]

Mr. Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure that I really understood the question, except that the word "independence" seems to have led to some misunderstanding. The member heard "independence" and is confused. I do not know. Financial independence is good for anyone. We are not talking about independence for Quebec; we are talking about financial independence for anyone who holds a position. Of course, it is clear that whatever pension rights the Bloc Québécois has obtained for elected members, it will maintain them in a sovereign Quebec. A sovereign Quebec would give its elected officials the same conditions.

• (1640)

I would like to give a very simple, direct answer on the issue of financial independence. A person should be paid for the work he or she does on the basis of the expenses incurred in doing it. It is also a matter of equity so that elected officials are not placed in situations where they always have to seek compensation from people or organizations providing some service or other because the elected officials do not have the financial independence they need to do their job.

That is why we wanted to include some expenses required in their work as part of the budget members of Parliament have, so that they do not have to have any Tom, Dick or Harry pay their restaurant bills every time, or their hotel accommodation, travel, air fare and so on. We are talking about financial independence so that members can act responsibly and completely free of bribery by others. It is very simple.

[English]

Mrs. Dianne Brushett (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member for Richmond—Wolfe, in the comments you had addressed the fact that you believed that age should be—