

State Pensions

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): No, 35 years. In 30 years he gets only 60 per cent. Madam Speaker, I do not think we should ask for it both ways. I do not think hon. members should ask for a generous formula that builds up our pensions faster than all the other pension plans in this bill, and also expect that we should get the full pension advantage of the higher rates of pay that this parliament passed a few months ago. There is no question about what I would do if this proposal stood by itself as a bill to amend the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act. That is the way it ought to have been done. As has happened before, it has been put into an omnibus bill which contains many things that we favour, as well as this point that some of us thoroughly oppose.

I would point also that as on a number of occasions after there has been debate on members' pensions, members will admit that there are some things in it that are too generous, particularly the right to draw pensions after six years of service, no matter what one's age. But nothing is ever done to correct such abuses. Let me carry it to the absurd. It would be possible, under the act we now have, for a person to be elected at age 18 and to be here six years, then at age 24 to draw a pension for life based on those six years of service. The likelihood of that happening is slight.

Mr. Baldwin: He would probably die a lot sooner.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): But there are cases of former members who qualified for a pension going out in their late thirties and forties on pensions for life.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Yes, and I can think of the shabby treatment some received, too.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Yes, there has been shabby treatment, and before this plan came into effect a lot of members of parliament were treated shabbily. We never covered such former members in any bill to amend the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act. I remind hon. members that when the Curtis report was presented to us some years ago, it called for the pensions of members of parliament to be deferred to age 55. As a matter of fact, everything in the Curtis report was accepted but that one point. Many members said afterwards that we should not have rejected that recommendation and that the next time this legislation was under review, we could change it. But none of those examples of generosity are being cut back in this legislation. Instead, it accepts all the generosity that is there and provides for this general 33½ per cent pension increase as well.

I submit that in these days, when we are being called upon to accept and to proclaim restraint, when we are asked to give leadership in this area, we should not in the same year, 1975, do the things that we have done, namely, provide substantial increases in our pay and allowances and also improve greatly the pension plans available to us. I accept the suggestion of the hon. member for Edmonton West that members of parliament should not be treated shabbily. That used to happen. There is nothing in this plan, however, to which the word "shabby" could apply. It is far too generous, and I hope that in the committee to which this bill is being referred we can take the time to look at its provisions in light of the leadership that the country expects from us at this time.

[Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West).]

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Madam Speaker, I was very happy to hear the resolution that this bill is being sent to committee. It is very important that it goes to the committee which is so concerned about other aspects of the public service. In that committee we also considered the superannuation of public servants who have reached the age of retirement. I think it was a very good thing. I was a little concerned, when the debate began this afternoon, about the propriety of the suggestion that we might refer the matter to the Supreme Court of Canada to decide whether the committee was right. That has been resolved, and I am pleased that was the decision of the committee. I believe the committee is the appropriate place to discuss such matters.

I am prepared to admit the difficulties with respect to the omnibus bill that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) has mentioned, but the committee is equipped to discuss the bill rationally. I am certain, since the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is a member of that committee, that the matters he has raised will be discussed in great detail. Since its inception, the committee has indicated its willingness to deal with these questions as a matter of balance.

In that committee a few days ago we were speaking about the role of legislators in describing certain matters and rights that have been given to public servants and others by statute. I think it was Senator Robert Stanbury who said that the legislator's role in that context is to balance the equities that exist and the differences that exist. I would suggest it is not fair to equate the position of a public servant, a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or a member of any other group who will benefit from this legislation with the position of a member of parliament. That would be unfair to members of parliament. The roles are different, the life is different, the problems are different, the obligations are different, and the circumstances in which they find themselves at varying periods of time in their professional lives as public servants or members of parliament are different.

As Senator Stanbury said, the job of the committee will be to balance those equities, to look rationally and honestly into the differences in the lives of the people involved. Whether for public servant or member of parliament, those pensions did not come about through avarice; they came about because the decision was made with respect to the different functions they perform. It is the same with the pensions for judges and lieutenant governors. I think consideration is being given to what men and women give up for a public life as opposed to other ways of life.

I say these things in response to the points raised by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, and I think that even he will recognize that there are differences. I share his concern about including these matters in an omnibus bill. Perhaps in some instances the practice of legislating omnibus bills is bad. But it has not been done for any improper or unreasonable purpose. This is an omnibus bill because it is convenient to consider these matters in such a bill. This is a busy House, as one can see by looking at the order paper.