

Government Orders

The next time around Canadians do not need to worry because if they vote for a Reform government this pension plan, regardless of what the bill says, will be gone, deep sixed as it should be. We will have a fair pension plan in which we match funds one for one, not this ridiculous four to one, gold plated plan we see have today.

Let me read one or two letters. It is almost sad to have to read a letter like this, but I will read a little to show what constituents think about MP pension plans. This letter came to my Chilliwack office:

In 1950 as a young nineteen year old man I was working as an apprentice making one dollar an hour. When Canada asked for volunteers to go to Korea I volunteered. I spent two years in the trenches and many times did not know if I would see the sunrise the next morning. Many of my comrades did not.

I continued to serve my country for another 15 years until I became a diabetic and was forced to retire from the armed forces. For all my dedicated service I received \$142 a month.

Three years ago I lost my leg and could not work any more. Now my pension is indexed and I receive \$580 a month.

A member of Parliament serves six years in office, receiving a good salary and many fringe benefits. If he is not re-elected after this time he receives a pension—

—this is under the old plan which many people on the front benches will qualify for—

—of \$40,000 a year which is already indexed. How can they justify this? My wife and I have worked hard all of our lives to raise six children and help build a way of life for ourselves and our fellow Canadians.

Why are my 16 years of service worth only \$142 a month and an MP's six years of service worth over \$3,000 a month?

If I were to be challenged on this idea of debating in public and I brought forward this letter what would be the response from the Liberal members? That is why they will not debate it outside of this place. It is a sad thing. How can one look in the eye of a veteran like this, a guy who has now lost his leg and is unable to work, and tell him: "Survive on \$500 a month and then pay my pension with your taxes?" I have said enough.

Mr. Mike Scott (Skeena, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am deeply troubled as I rise today to speak to the issue of MP pensions. My opposition to the pension plan and that of my colleagues is well known and our refusal to accept it is well known.

What especially troubles me today is the way the government is using time allocation to ram this and other bills through the House without proper debate. This is an abuse of our parliamentary system.

In speaking to the pension scheme, as I often do when I am speaking on bills in the House, I always refer back to the auditor general's observations about what government spending should be about. There should always be accountability. There should always be a designated goal and a measurement for whether those goals are being achieved by the expenditure. What is the purpose of this pension plan? What is it meant to do? Is it achieving that?

When the American government was instituted some two centuries ago there was actually a spirited public debate as to whether legislators should be paid at all. Some said they had to be because otherwise only the wealthy could engage in politics. Others said they should not because politics should not attract people who thought they could make a comfortable living if they were good at it.

• (1615)

The decision that they should be paid seems obvious, but back then politics was not a full time occupation. Legislatures sat less often for less time and they did a whole lot less legislating. Maybe that is something we could enjoy as Canadians. By the way, back in 1867 Canadian MPs were paid \$6 a day. Things are a little different today. Now we have professional politicians. That is the consequence of the decision to pay them well.

That has both good and bad aspects. On the bad side, too many people in the House have never had real jobs. I do not say that political expertise is always bad. We do need people who understand how to get things done and how to work within the parliamentary system. I suppose it is good that some people can do politics full time as a career, but we can have too much of a good thing.

In any case, the decision was made to pay politicians so that financial barriers to holding public office would not exist. That is defensible, and it produced predictable results. MPs are also paid fairly well today. We are not paid as well as some people may think, although as my colleague from Calgary Centre recently pointed out, we are paid more than is apparent. We are paid reasonably so that we can afford to devote ourselves full time to the job and, to be quite honest, so we will be harder to corrupt. Frankly, that is money well spent. MPs who are struggling to survive and to keep the wolf away from the door are obviously more susceptible to improper approaches. So we have good reason for paying politicians and for paying them reasonably well.

What about the pension scheme? What is the reason for having this pension plan in the first place, and why is it so generous? It is obvious that the purpose of the pension is to enable people to stay with a career, knowing that when it is over they will be provided for. Private sector companies have pensions for that reason, and it is quite reasonable.

No one doubts the desirability of having pensions for MPs, as my colleague just pointed out. The real question before us today is do we have a good reason for having an outrageously generous pension system for MPs compared to their salaries and compared to the private sector and compared to other Canadians? Put another way, is there a good reason for structuring the rewards for politics so that MPs get less now and more later, that is, if they survive six years or longer? Is there a good reason for