

Pension Act

in council, and that it is carrying out government policy instead of the independent policy of the commission.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Chairman, I was interested in an expression used by the minister. His explanation of the reason for the legislation was a need of flexibility. I find the definition of the word "flexible" in the Concise Oxford Dictionary is this: "That will bend without breaking; pliant, easily led, manageable." I was wondering whether that is what he had in mind, because that is exactly what we have suggested—that the placing of this power in the hands of the government would make it possible for the government to exercise control. I would ask the minister this question: What has happened in the last year or so that has accelerated this demand for flexibility in the legislation? Has any member of the commission been almost lost because of a lack of flexibility? What is the reason for the haste in this legislation? What has taken place that has demanded this drastic action which, in my opinion, denies the inviolability of this institution? I think the house would listen with keen interest to the minister were he just to reveal what has happened that has placed the government in a position where it has decided that a commission that has been in existence for more than 30 years must have its constitutional background completely changed. What event has placed the government in the position of demanding this so-called flexibility?

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Lapointe: I think I have already given the explanation. As I said before, it is simple. My hon. friend has referred to my use of the word "flexibility". Maybe it was not the right word; my knowledge of English is not as extensive as his. But I used it in opposition to the word "rigidity". He might read that in the dictionary, and find out what it means.

Mr. Fulton: That is a very interesting contrast which the minister suggests.

Mr. Lapointe: The contrast between Liberals and Conservatives.

Mr. Fulton: Yes; the Liberals are so flexible that they can disregard completely all principles. But the point is that the pension commission was set up on certain principles. And those principles were that, under the control of parliament—not under the control of this government—the commission should do the best possible job for the veterans. And it is that principle which we would like to see adhered to.

[Mr. Noseworthy.]

Mr. Abbott: And what does that mean?

Mr. Fulton: It means what it says. Possibly the Minister of Finance cannot understand the meaning of words. I do not think I used any word of more than four letters.

Mr. Lapointe: Four-letter words, from the comics?

Mr. Fulton: If there is any word the minister does not understand, I will be glad to explain it.

Mr. Abbott: Oh, I understand the words; I did not understand what the sentence meant, though.

Mr. Fulton: The house and country will understand very well what the sentence meant, and the principle I have in mind. The principle, of course, is that the affairs of the Canadian pension commission, including the salaries of the commissioners, shall be under the control of parliament. That is the principle which has been followed since the end of the first world war until the present time. It is a principle which the government now seeks to change by the bill before us, and in no particular is it more substantially changed than by the provision that salaries of the commissioners shall be in the gift of the government, so that parliament itself loses control to that extent over the salaries of the Canadian pension commission. The minister himself used the word "flexible". That is an interesting word. He said he used it in contrast to the word "rigidity". I suggest to him and to the government that with respect to its control over the salaries of the Canadian pension commission this parliament desires rigidly, or should desire rigidly, to insist upon its right to say what shall happen in respect to the Canadian pension commission and in respect to all affairs of the Canadian pension commission, than which of course there can be no more important aspect than the state of their salaries.

It would be interesting, Mr. Chairman, to hear from the minister in what way the affairs of the commission have been prejudiced by what I can only take from the minister's words to have been found by experience to be undue rigidity. Are the commissioners less able to look after the interests of the veterans because their salaries are rigidly fixed? Would it conduce better to the conduct of the affairs of the commission and the awarding of pensions if their salaries were to be flexible? Is that the suggestion the minister makes? I should hardly think so, and yet I would be interested to hear him explain what other interpretation we are to put upon his words.

The minister suggested a moment ago that there was some effort here to indicate that