

National Defence Act Amendment

Calgary North pointed out that under those circumstances there might be a situation where a great number of serving personnel might wish to retire at the same time. A group of personnel, for example, half a unit, might make application for retirement. They have decided they are going to retire under a certain set of circumstances.

The minister said that this is no problem at all, or words to that effect. I am paraphrasing. He said that under those circumstances the department would in effect change the regulations and not allow this. The serving man, however, assumes that he has this right, but if it is only a right which exists at the convenience of the service then it is not a right at all. This is a most demoralizing situation. I have heard the argument put forward that something might be done because it affected only a few and that therefore there was nothing wrong in doing it, that is, that any inconvenience which might be involved in carrying out the terms of the government's obligation was out of all proportion to the number of persons concerned. When it comes to a matter of keeping an obligation, I do not think in all justice that this should be based on convenience. The obligation which rests with the service to keep its side of the bargain should be just as binding as the obligation of the individual.

● (2:10 p.m.)

This is something which goes back a long time. Perhaps I may be excused if I cite an experience I had. This was one of the reasons I did not remain in the permanent force after world war II. In 1939 the R.C.A.F. started a program under which it granted some short service commissions because there was an apprehension that a national emergency might arise. Young men were offered short service commissions in the R.C.A.F. I was one of them. One of the requirements was that you were a university graduate; another was that you were in a certain age group, and so on. The terms under which we joined the service were that we would serve on active service for a period of four years, which could be extended to a total of ten years if a national emergency existed at the end of the four years. For taking this risk, as it were, in a kind of indefinite contract, part of the agreement of enlistment was that for every year served except the first year one was on active service, he would be given a gratuity of, as I recall, \$500 a year until the end of the active service.

Two classes of aircrew were inducted into the air force and given commissions before the war began. These short service commissions were discontinued at that point or shortly thereafter. We had joined the service in the summer of 1939. After the war began there was a general raise in service pay which applied to the permanent force, to the people with short service commissions and to the special reserve, those people who joined the service after the war began, for the duration of the war. Naturally everyone accepted the increase in pay automatically and without question.

After about a year and a half we received a registered letter saying that since we were accepting the increase in pay we were no longer eligible for a gratuity at the end of our service unless we wished to return the increase in pay retroactively for the year and a half. We were a very small group. Quite a number had not been kept on—this was one of the terms of enlistment—because they were found not to have the aptitude to become flying instructors or aircrew members. After a year and a half quite a large number—I might say that these people kept their side of the bargain—accepted discharge from the service without question.

By the time the year and a half was up quite a number had been killed; only a very few survived the war. They kept their side of the bargain, but the government never paid the gratuity to the few who survived the war because they were a small, insignificant group. In my judgment, this is not something you can measure by numbers. It is a principle, a contract that must be honoured. I must confess that after the war, before I left the service in 1947, I was offered a permanent commission. I did not accept it, and one of the reasons I did not accept it was that I knew that a contract which I entered into in joining the service was binding on me but was only binding on the service as a matter of convenience and within certain limits. Actually, I am very pleased now—in fact, I have never been more pleased in my life—that I did not accept a permanent commission, because I can think of no more appalling situation to befall one than to be a serving officer under the present minister.

Mr. Forrestall: He would have thrown you out.

Mr. MacLean (Queens): He probably would, but that is neither here nor there. The point I