

Pension Act

the same concession; the Minister of Transport can ask for the same thing for the benefit of the board of transport commissioners. And after that precedent is set, in the event of any argument every member is in a position to do what Mr. Speaker does every once in a while: He can go back to 1800 and take a ruling made by someone, and offer it as a precedent to justify a decision now being made.

We should consider very carefully before we pass this kind of legislation. As I said before, the committee acted in a flexible manner in respect of the bills that went before it. Many good amendments were made. This was one of the points at issue, and I think it deserves reconsideration on the part of members in the House of Commons. There should be no effort to drive in a wedge at this stage of the session. It would be a very bad precedent and, as the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra has said, it would shake the confidence of veterans across the country. It would take from members of parliament the right to vote money, and that is another bad precedent.

I believe someone on the government side, preferably the Minister of Veterans Affairs, should say, "Let us try this for another year." We have had it since 1919. It has not done any harm. The commissioners are not underpaid, and as far as I am concerned I have always thought that when they came before the veterans affairs committee they came as representatives of the veterans in an independent position. If they come in next year as appointees with salaries fixed by the treasury board, as far as I am concerned they will no longer be independent. They will be there as representatives of the government, because he who controls my job and pays me controls me. That is true in any walk of life that you may get into. I join with the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra in what he said. He put the case very well; there is no need of my repeating it. All members on the committee from our group take the same position.

Mr. Quelch: This clause has been what you might call the main bone of contention in the veterans affairs committee. The government has tossed it to us and said, chew on it for a while. I listened to the interesting speech of the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra. He made a pretty good case for rescinding this clause. He asked for explanations from the government as to why it was necessary to change clause 2. I understand that this section has been in the act since 1919. Therefore it is rather strange that in 1954 the government decides to change the

[Mr. Gillis.]

method by which the commission shall be paid. The explanatory note merely says:

This is a new subsection which provides that the salaries of the chairman, deputy chairman and commissioners, including ad hoc commissioners, are to be fixed by the governor in council rather than by the statute as heretofore.

There is not one word of explanation there as to why the change is made, in spite of the fact that members on this side of the house and members from all parties have asked the government and the Minister of Veterans Affairs to give an explanation. So far we have not had a single squeak from the government. Surely it is about time that we received some information as to why this change is necessary.

When we go back to our constituencies and address meetings of veterans and they ask us why this change was made, what will be our reply? What explanation can we give to them as to the reason why the change is being made? We have not had an explanation. We hear a lot of explanations being given by members of different groups but they are not the type of explanations that one would like to give to a veterans' meeting. It is said the change is made in order to make it possible for the government to raise the salaries of the commission without going through parliament; that it is being made in order to give the government the whip hand over the commission so that if they grant pensions that are too high then they can be threatened with a reduction in salaries. If, on the other hand, they do just exactly what the government want them to do they will increase their salaries as a reward. I do not agree with that, but we must have an explanation.

The Minister of Finance shakes his head. I think he should shake his head. He should do more than that. He should rise in his place and explain to the committee why this change is necessary, because we are going to have to make an explanation, and if we are not given an explanation by the government, we shall have to give an explanation of our own. I am afraid that if we give an explanation of our own it will perhaps not be as good an explanation as could be given by members of the government. Therefore we shall be bound to vote against this clause unless the government can give some good reason why the section should not remain in the act.

Mr. Nesbitt: Mr. Chairman, I have a brief word on clause 2. First of all we should consider what sort of a body the pension commission is. Is it a quasi, or semi-judicial body, or is it not? If it is not a semi-judicial body, then there should be procedure for