

Supplementary Retirement Benefits Act (No. 2)

our system of social security and on the public servants' own pension plan, as we see in this Bill before the House. At the same time it is intended to create the illusion that the Government is doing something about the declining purchasing power of poor and middle-income Canadians, while in fact money is being taken from the poor and given to the rich.

Bill C-133 is a distasteful piece of legislation. Through this Bill the Government intends to reduce the pensions of Public Service employees, derived from their own pension funds.

● (1550)

Just before I conclude, let me read a couple of paragraphs from a news release put out by the Public Service Alliance of Canada. It is dated December 7, 1982, and concerns Bill C-133. In part, this release reads:

Again, this is a deception being perpetrated by the federal government. The same government that reneged on signed contracts with its own employees is now reneging on a legislative agreement with its former employees.

Federal public service employees have been deceived by their own employer. They have contributed to a pension plan under the condition that they would receive a fully indexed allowance but the government has unilaterally changed the rules, leaving pensioners stranded.

The reduction in the indexing of federal public service pensions is a punitive measure aimed at those who can least afford it and the minimal saving will do nothing to improve the economy.

That last sentence says it all.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is a punitive measure. It represents a minimal saving to the Government but at a high cost to those who can least afford it. It will do nothing, I repeat, nothing to improve the economy. It is for these very reasons, Mr. Speaker, that I and my Party oppose this legislation, just as we opposed Bill C-124, Bill C-131 and Bill C-132. We will not be party to any legislation that breaks faith with the Public Service workers or the pensioners of this country.

Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Dartmouth-Halifax East): Mr. Speaker, I will be relatively brief in my remarks. This matter came most directly to our attention when we dealt with Bill C-124. My opposition to that Bill was expressed in the usual way here on the floor of the House by my recorded vote in opposition to it. I voted in opposition because it was abundantly clear what the Government intended to do. There was an understanding and agreement that such universal programs and commitments were made to public servants, maybe not contractually in written form and on paper, but nevertheless valid, not only in my judgment but in the minds of upwards of 200,000 retired public servants, their widows and other dependants. They were absolutely certain in their minds that there was an understanding and an agreement.

As with that measure then, the same holds true with respect to the measure currently before us, and it is my intention to vote against it as well. I do so because it does not represent, as offered by Government, the means of bold leadership on restraint in this country. It represents to me the conundrum which people must face when they are faced with decisions made in principle or on principle. Principle, it seems to me, is never changed. Frequently the method of expressing principle is changed. Here we do not have that course of action on the

part of the Government but, rather, quite the opposite. The principle is of no concern whatsoever, expediency is.

I have one or two comments with respect to the silence of the junior Government Member from the electoral riding of Halifax, the Minister of State for International Trade (Mr. Regan). I wonder, as do thousands upon thousands of public sector employees in the metropolitan area of Halifax-Dartmouth why the Minister has been silent on this subject. He is derelict in his responsibility to those people. The Hon. Member for Halifax West (Mr. Crosby) and myself have taken a common stand. We have invited the Minister's participation on behalf of one of the largest groupings of public sector employees in this nation, but we have had no response. The Minister has remained silent. Eventually he will have to answer to those people in his constituency who will be most directly affected by this legislation.

It is not my intention to put numbers on the record, the numbers involved in this Bill or the number of people affected. This job has been done by many others. The amount of money involved is relatively small compared to our deficit. We have a deficit rising toward \$26 billion. The amount of money that is to be saved through this legislation represents only 0.02 per cent of the deficit. The amount, when looking at total Government expenditures, is virtually nothing. We bail out CNR. We bail out CBC annually. We bail out Air Canada and any company that needs bailing out: Chrysler, Massey-Ferguson to name two, all of this in the name of saving jobs.

Surely this Government recognizes that our country will not progress with regressive legislation such as is before us. This Bill is odious. It is unjust. It perpetrates inequities upon those who place trust in it. It affects the pension base of thousands upon thousands of public servants who will be retiring in the next two to three years. This Bill seriously affects the base from which calculations will be made. All one has to do is to multiply this base throughout years of retirement.

This Bill represents a loss of many, many thousands of dollars. It represents a loss to widows and other dependants of deceased employees. This Bill is wrong. The Government was wrong to consider it. Whether or not the Government did this out of concern or to get on the bandwagon with the private sector, I do not know. Certainly the six and five program was a follow-the-private-sector role, as we now know from evidence clearly before us. It was not, as the Government suggests, leadership in the restraint program which, God knows, this nation needs. I repeat, this Bill should be opposed.

I would hope that those on the other side know the deep concern this holds for retired public sector employees, serving employees, not only in the Public Service but in Crown corporations, the Armed Forces, the RCMP—in fact, for employees throughout the public sector. Members on the other side know, they know it in their hearts. I wonder how they are going to deal with principle. I wonder whether they are going to let what they clearly understand to be principle be subjected to the view, or someone's view over there, that this Government must not fall.