

*Government Orders*

• (2110)

In fact the reason this independent inquiry is happening now is because of our leader. It is not because of what the Liberal Party has done. The Liberal Party has done nothing.

I come from a province that happens to have an NDP government. We have had an NDP government for most of the last 50 years. Under the NDP government we have brought in all kinds of legislation that has helped average Canadians, average residents in Saskatchewan, far more than this hon. member has done either as the federal Liberal Party in power or in the province of Ontario, or anywhere else in this country.

The member need not stand in place and hurl comments at this party. It is the New Democratic Party that has done more for social programs for the average Canadian than any other party in this country.

**Mr. Francis G. LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to add my few words to this debate on Bill C-55 and speak to some very specific provisions in response to representations which I received from numerous constituents concerning this legislation.

Most constituents are concerned with one thing. They see this bill as a serious threat to their indexed pensions. My constituents are worried and confused about what is in the bill. Although it is thick and complex, they all recognize that it is an obvious attempt by this government to bury its attack on indexation deep within the bill, hoping that no one will notice.

Everyone has noticed, Mr. Speaker; civil servants, the armed forces, and veterans. They have all noticed what this government is doing and they are not going to let it get away with it.

The bill amends four pension acts, public servants, Canadian forces, RCMP, and members of Parliament. This bill could very well be several bills and by all rights should have been separated.

The most controversial element of the bill falls on page 32. It is here that clause 71(3) states that should any of the regulations made under this bill conflict with the act itself that the regulations would prevail.

That is exactly what has caused all the concern. This clause leaves the door open for the government to

sneakily enact a regulation affecting indexation, thereby avoiding having to go to Parliament with it.

I know well how much this government hates going to Parliament. The fisheries minister has avoided Parliament for over a year now with his individual transferable quotas and his dockside monitoring program.

Pensioners across the country protested and groups which appeared before the legislative committee spelled out their concerns.

At first the Treasury Board president dismissed these concerns as irrelevant and unfounded but he finally gave in and proposed an amendment in committee. Its text is on page 34, clause 71(5). It protects against a reduction in benefits at the hands of any regulation but it only offers protection for benefits which have accrued before the day on which the regulation is made. Any and all future benefits are unprotected and up for grabs.

Keith Pickering is a constituent of mine from Inverness. He is an armed forces retiree with over 21 years of service in Canada. I would like to quote a section of his letter to me:

We believed the government, our employer, would look after our pension fund the same as they looked after their own pension fund. I find out now that the government does not really care about their employees or their welfare, as Bill C-55 has shown.

Mr. Pickering and other armed forces retirees recognize that there are some good things in the bill for them such as increasing the supplementary death benefits for armed forces' survivors. But these good things pale in comparison to the potential for disaster should indexation be left vulnerable.

These positive elements in the bill also include pension splitting, coverage for part-time workers, and early retirement for correctional services employees. Because these are long overdue, their presence in Bill C-55 makes it more difficult to oppose the bill as a whole. Their presence pits pensioner against pensioner and is, I believe, all part of the government's "divide and conquer" mentality.

Another constituent called yesterday morning concerned about the pension splitting provisions of the bill. She is worried that this element of the bill will not come into effect in time to help her. She and thousands of other Canadians have been waiting for years for this government to act on this issue. This government has coupled in this bill positive provisions like pension splitting with something as dangerously wrong as dein-