

*Government Orders*

that the MPs' pension fund is unfunded, in practical terms it has not been unfunded.

The second fact that is interesting is that there are only 500 to 700 people who have received pensions under the plan, most of whom are widows or spouses as well as retired MPs. The suggestion that somehow this is a terribly rich privilege, upon examination is probably not correct.

• (1810)

The concerns about double-dipping do need to be looked at. Examples need to be reviewed, but I also think we should keep in mind the kind of pensions the private sector pays. Some of those should be put in perspective. Not that pensions for MPs should reach those levels, but the reverse should be so; those who control private wealth in this country should not be able to vote themselves the kind of pensions they do at the expense of the consumer.

Having spoken on that issue, let me deal with the substantive issues included in this pension act and the amendments to that act. Apart from a brief reference to pensions for MPs the bill effectively deals with two or three main areas.

The first is to make substantial changes in the administration of public sector pension funds. Initially, some of those changes look to be not half bad. But on further consideration and further examination it has become clear that this government has been sold a bill of goods by Treasury Board public servants.

Government has not done its own homework in protecting the prerogative of Parliament and effectively is turning over to the government and to Treasury Board all kinds of powers which it ought not to have, given Treasury Board is not just the administrator of public funds but is also the employer of public servants. In that dual function conflict of interest is built in in respect of its duties.

It is therefore critically important that any tinkering with public sector pensions comes before Parliament so that all sides of this House and therefore the general public can have some input into those changes. Those changes should not be made behind closed doors merely by a matter of regulation without public hearing, without input.

The more we studied this bill and the more we reviewed it, we reluctantly came to the conclusion that in

public policy terms we will have to vote against the bill. We will do so reluctantly because there are some good elements in the bill.

For the first time, federal part-time workers are covered in a pension plan, although the cut-off date is arbitrary and unfair. In the post office, for example, and in other areas of the public sector there have been those working part-time for years and years. Their service in that capacity is not counted toward a part-time pension. I think the cut-off date is 1980.

Similarly, the early retirement for correction workers is evidently and clearly a good thing and needs to be adopted. On the other hand, what the government has given with one hand it has taken away with the other. It imposed a power over that early retirement plan through regulation that it ought not to have.

We clearly support the thrust of the pension splitting provisions in Schedule II of the act. I would like to use most of my remaining time on that issue.

I represent a constituency that has many military and other government retirees, many ex-spouses of those who worked in the service of Canada. Many of them have come to me and we drafted petitions which have been presented throughout the community and have been tabled in this House from time to time over the last number of months. They have come to me with letters, with accounts of the impact on their lives of the failure of this Parliament to deal fairly with ex-spouses of Public Service personnel and particularly members of the military.

Many of them have clearly given a service beyond the usual to our country. When they married someone in the military service, they undertook to travel across Canada and in fact, to many parts of the world. They tried to raise their families in two, three and four-year segments in different communities. They have suffered through the difficulties, tensions, trials and tribulations of that kind of life. Then at some point along the way, the marriage breaks down. They have been often left destitute or in difficult circumstances.

One of the difficulties they have had to face is that the pension they contributed to, which in the case of the military, the RCMP and others becomes payable on retirement, often when they are in their early 40s, mid 40s or 50s, that pension has not been available to them except occasionally through a court battle as supporter maintenance.