

*Government Orders*

pension contributions and an early retirement program for correctional service officers.

We have long recognized that this legislation would bring a few minor improvements to the Public Service plan. We cautiously supported it at second reading in February in order that a detailed study in committee could be undertaken. However, we in opposition have realized after close study that there is far more that is negative than positive and that Bill C-55 contains major flaws.

I might add at this point that this bill probably has created more letter writing and more phone calls to my office than any bill that has come before us for quite a number of months. Obviously it is of great concern to many people.

I have received dozens of phone calls and letters from constituents in Nepean and not one person, I might add, supported this bill. Many were concerned that this legislation as it now stands would give the government the power to change critical financial aspects of pension management by regulation instead of legislation.

Does the government understand the significance of this? Does it think that Canadians will not know the difference? It means that major policy decisions will now be removed from the realm of this Parliament. It means that the government will not be accountable to the people of Canada and that secret deals can very well be made, but I would certainly hope not. It is an infringement on one's democratic rights.

The government says we should just trust it and it will look out for the rights of pensioners. Well, I think we have all seen too many things in this House and therefore a great number of Canadians no longer trust this government.

• (1730)

If it were really going to do what is right, it would enshrine the management of pensions in legislation. Yet it refuses to do this.

During committee stage, opposition members listened to countless witnesses who appeared before the legislative committee. All proposed reasonable changes to the legislation, and yet the government has chosen not to listen to any of them.

I just wish that I had the opportunity or the time allocation to comment on all the wonderful changes,

reasonable changes, that many people had requested. One of the most often requested changes, and I will quote from one person's letter, is this:

I do wish to stress that the benefits provided for in Bill C-55 should be preserved so that all financial management of it be delayed with current financial benefits being protected until a proper management board is established. This will ensure that amendments receive fair and complete review by all parties.

Furthermore, the bill should be amended to include all the provisions of the Pension Benefits Standards Act as is required of other pension funds in the civilian sector.

That is from a resident of my riding, Mr. Robert Black. Many, many other people said something similar along that line.

The government has hardly moved on the legislation at all since it was tabled in February. There has been slight movement, but very very slight. It is more interested in pushing through a bill, any bill, than it is in ensuring good governance.

The reality of Bill C-55 is that it is flawed, and the portions that may be beneficial are too little and too late.

Over the past decade two parliamentary committees have examined pension reform from the point of view of the adequacy of public and private sector plans, to meet the retirement needs of Canadians, and from the perspective of equality rights established in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Legislative changes arising from the reports of these committees have been made to the Canada and Quebec pension plans and to the Pension Benefits Standards Act, which defines minimum standards for federally-regulated employers.

Bill C-55 addresses to some degree the following outstanding equality issues:

It provides for splitting of pension credits on the breakdown of a marriage or common-law relationship.

Current legislation does not allow for the splitting of pension credits, so the new bill would permit the division of a plan member's pension benefits at source. That obviously is a good move.

A spousal agreement or court order would be required providing for the division of the benefits. Up to 50 per cent of the credits would be transferred to a retirement savings vehicle for the spouse, and the plan member's benefits would be adjusted accordingly.