

Supply

should be answered when they have practical consequences and if the practical consequences disturb the general public conception of what is right and proper.

I hope in considering revisions of the pension plan we will not merely consider barring former MPs from collecting their MPs pensions while they take on a judicial, civil service, ambassadorial or other post. I hope we will consider whether it should not in equitable terms reach out also to those who have taken pensions from the provincial domain or even from the municipal domain.

As I said sovereignty in classical theory is indivisible. I see no reason why artificial boundaries should be set up. Some might even raise the issue of whether civil servant pensions should not be viewed in the same way and when they are federal civil service pensions the logic becomes very persuasive and convincing.

I have taken note of the comments already made in the debate on the balance between contributions by members of Parliament and contributions by Parliament itself. This is one of the issues the government will be looking at in its revised plans for the pension scheme.

To be frank I have in mind one possible reform that would be crucially affected if there was more nearly a balance between the two contributions and that is the portability of pensions. Those of us who know the American system of government or those of us who have been familiar with universities or other public institutions will know that the principle of portability is very well assured.

People may serve at a distinguished university like the University of Calgary and then move on after a year to another university. It is a quite common practice for a pension right to vest after a year's service. It may not be very much. It may provide only for one good dinner at the Palliser Hotel or somewhere else but the principle is important enough.

It has always struck me as rather artificial that the pension rights vest after six years. That provides an inducement to members to serve a second term where it may be in their own best interests and the best interests of the country might better be served if they contented themselves with one term. Obviously if the pension contributions by one party, by Parliament, are out of line with the member's own contributions that sort of sensible reform as I see it tends to break down, or the logic for it tends to disappear.

• (1350)

On the indexing issue which has been raised, it is very clear that this enters into larger approaches to social security and the

Canadian social security network. Obviously what is good for one category of society should be good for all categories.

We either move to a general system of indexing, which may be one way of facing inflation and the generally rising costs of living, or we have to move out of the areas where that exists. These again are well within the ambit of the government's proposals and the government's consideration of reform of the pension system and should be considered in that light.

This issue has been raised in the House and I think it is worth considering: Where and when will reforms begin? Can they be prospective only? Is there such a system as vested rights? Can you not touch what has gone before?

It is true that as a matter of constitutional law what we are dealing with is really only a constitutional privilege. That is to say Parliament has the full competence to apply any reform measures it may devise retroactively as well as prospectively.

If we were considering that, one thing to consider would be the condition of the earlier MPs who came in before the present pension system was devised. I am quite shocked to learn of some of the pension provisions for people serving from the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, and some of them are still around, before the present scheme came in. These are really hardship situations.

Obviously there is a difference between what is constitutionally permissible and what considerations of equity would demand. Any revision by the government should perhaps include a look at these pioneer members of Parliament who retired before the present scheme came into operation.

It would obviously be easier in terms of general conceptions of what is right and proper to deal only with present cases, that is to say members elected in 1993. It may well be that the main thrust of the reform proposals is directed there.

There has been discussion of self-administered pension plans. A good deal depends, Madam Speaker, as you are very well aware, on the competence of those administering the self-administered pension plans, the financial advisers. We do need some more details here. If the opposition parties have suggestions they should submit them in detail into the debate.

Most members of Parliament whatever their other competencies do not have great expertise in this general area. One is reminded of the fact that many members of Parliament are lawyers. Frankly many lawyers have great difficulty in devising a pension plan that is fair to themselves.

The self-administered pension plan looks to be an easy way out. However it would have to be some sort of plan that would look to a co-operative unit within Parliament and that would require discussion among the parties.