

*Statute Law Amendment Act, 1970*

to accept. It is my view that there is no justification for our using this bill, which was brought in after many years of pleading and many years of study by committees, departmental groups and so on, to revamp and upgrade the pensions of Members of Parliament and Senators.

I have said on other occasions, both when the bill was at the second reading stage and in the committee, that everybody else is being told that he must wait. In particular, the old age pensioners are being told that they must wait until we get the white paper on social security. Veterans who are on war veterans allowances are not being considered under the terms of the study being made of the Woods report and are being told that nothing can be done about their allowances until we have the results of this study presented to us in the white paper on social security.

I find it hard to understand how Parliament or the government can say to all these other groups that they must wait but that we can go ahead and act on our own behalf. When I made this point in the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs, to which this bill was referred, the reply of the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald) was to cite the Curtis report. He said, and I think I am being fair to him, that in the case of the pension plan of Members of Parliament there had been this special study made, separate and apart from the white paper on social security, and since we already have the Curtis report that gives us the basis for acting.

I do not accept that argument at all. As a matter of fact, I do not accept the device that the government used in setting up Dr. Curtis as being justifiable. Professor Curtis was not commissioned by Parliament to do this job, and he was not asked by Parliament to do it. As a matter of fact, there was not even an announcement in Parliament that he had been appointed.

I remember very well a few years ago when the present Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson), who was then the President of the Treasury Board, wanted to do this, and even asked us if we would agree to a motion in Parliament to have such a study made. Many of us indicated to him that we were not favourable to such a course being taken, so the government went ahead and did it anyway, but entirely on its own.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

• (12:20 p.m.)

If I read correctly the letter from Professor Curtis to the President of the Treasury Board, it would seem that this study was made just on the basis of a letter written directly from the then President of the Treasury Board, now the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) to Professor Curtis. So, it seems to me this Curtis report is not a Bible that can be used for the purpose of doing something the government simply wants to do. I heard of no public hearings. I remember hearing after a while that Professor Curtis was carrying on the study, but the information was conveyed to us as though we were being given secret information. There was no publicity or mention about the Curtis report until suddenly it was tabled on the very day the minister indicated that Bill C-194 would include the provisions improving the pension plan for Members of Parliament. So I think it is clear that we have no right at this stage to ask for consideration of our pensions when war veterans on the allowance, old age pensioners and others are being told they must wait until there has been a complete review of social security.

I also feel very strongly, in light of the austerity that is being preached and the restraint people are being urged to exercise, that it just does not go down for us to be urging this course on our own behalf. When that is coupled with something else that is being studied by another three-man committee, namely a possible pay increase, the announcement of which was made in the House, it adds up to a serious question of whether we in the House of Commons are prepared to accept the same proposals for restraint and austerity we are imposing on everyone else.

I feel very strongly, Mr. Speaker, that this is not the time to be doing this kind of thing. I believe that if we go ahead and do it we will just give the people of Canada an opportunity to say that the Members of Parliament are certainly moving very fast in doing something for themselves and that they are moving a lot faster in that regard than they are moving in respect of doing something for the people of Canada as a whole. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) is the author of the statement that one difficulty in time of inflation is that those who can protect themselves do so and therefore do not fight as actively as they might against inflation. It certainly looks as though that is what we are trying to do both in respect of the pay question which is