

Veterans Affairs

shoulder the cost of bringing unemployment down to that level by stimulating the economy.

Some people may think that I am overreacting but I am not, Mr. Speaker. I have here a research paper which is extremely objective and which explains the various amendments to the act since 1971. I shall not go through them all but there are a few that I should like to comment upon. Dealing with the changes which came into effect in 1976, the document defines the purpose as—

—to provide a better balance in the sharing of costs among the federal government, employers and employees.

That is a euphemism for saying that more of the costs will be shifted from the government to the employer-employee.

The document also deals with some of the changes in the bill that altered the eligibility period from eight weeks to ten to fourteen and with the cost saving, regardless of the impact on the work force and regardless of the fact that there was no evidence that the eight weeks resulted in any more abuse than 19, 20, ten or 14 weeks. On page 12 of the document there appears the following statement:

● (1700)

The amendment was made because it was felt that the former eight-week entrance requirement provided an all too readily financial inducement reinforcing unstable work patterns.

When one asked our economist about this, the answer given was that there was no evidence about unstable work patterns. That evidence is available—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but the time has arrived for private members' hour.

It being five o'clock, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed in today's order paper, namely, private bills, notices of motions (papers), public bills.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

[English]

DECENTRALIZATION OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Tom Cossitt (Leeds-Grenville) moved:

That an order of the House do issue for copies of all correspondence, notes, minutes of meetings and other communications relating to the decentralization of the Department of Veterans Affairs to the province of Prince Edward Island.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the government has refused to produce to Parliament all documents, correspondence and details of negotiations with regard to the movement of the Department of Veterans Affairs to Prince Edward Island. This is a most regrettable decision considered against the background facts, namely, that the thousands of members of the Canadian

Legion from coast to coast have asked that the department be left in Ottawa. In addition, no one can quite accept the necessity of doing something that will probably, as estimated, cost Canadian taxpayers anywhere between \$30 million and \$40 million and in the long run will give nothing to Prince Edward Island.

First of all, why has the government refused these documents? We were told a few days ago that it would be too costly to photocopy the documents. In my view, this is nonsense. It seems to be a convenient way of answering, a ploy which this government has often used in the past to shield many matters; namely, it is too costly to copy.

The simple, plain truth is that publication of such documents would, in my view, reveal that the whole thing in the first place was a crass political manoeuvre or somewhat of a political pay-off. The Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) lived in Prince Edward Island, so what better way to bolster his political fortunes than to move the department from Ottawa all the way there? This of course, will result in a decrease in service to veterans of Canada and a high cost to the taxpayers, but such factors were apparently quite incidental to the political facts of life.

I must say with regret that my own party, while in office, did not reverse this perverse decision, but then, I can only offer the excuse, and it is not a very strong one, that we did not have much time. Now the present administration carries on in the same blind, stupid way, a fact that would be clearly revealed by making public the documents which the government is still keeping hidden from public view.

I admit that the government has condescendingly said that I could look at the documents personally if I wished to do so, but I do not think that answered the question. I am not the hundreds of thousands of members of the Canadian Legion from coast to coast or the millions of taxpayers in this country who have a right to know. I must, in all conscience, take the stand that I am talking at this time, namely that it is a matter of principle, and one should not slavishly follow something that one believes is utterly and completely wrong.

I can find every reason to be against the move to Prince Edward Island and not a single reason to be in favour. Let me deal with the views of the Royal Canadian Legion on this topic. One of the complaints, in my opinion a very valid one indeed, made by the veterans of Canada is the length of time that it presently takes for something to be dealt with by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The processing of a pension seems to average anywhere from 12 to 18 months, and if a veteran wishes to appeal a decision, the appeal can last up to as long as two years or more. I have known cases in my own constituency, and I am sure other members have faced somewhat similar situations, where veterans have died between the time they first applied and the time the decision was made. This is an intolerable and unacceptable situation. How does the government believe that by moving things to Prince Edward Island and leaving the minister with a small, skeleton staff here in Ottawa is going to improve the situation?