

*Government Orders*

• (1550 )

I want to go through several very specific aspects of how the government has approached this bill to explain clearly why we are voting against it despite some long awaited improvements in pensions, especially some that relate to charter rights of certain groups in society.

Pension reform has a long history going back over a decade. In the early 1980s there was a major parliamentary review of pension plans in Canada in recognition of the fact that Canada had an aging population and that in the very near future we would have a much larger proportion of our population in the retirement years.

There was genuine and legitimate public concern about how people would support themselves in retirement and whether the country's pension plans were adequate for people to live with dignity, decency and comfort after a lifetime of working.

That commission reported and recommended some major reforms to numerous pension plans and to legislation governing pension plans in Canada. Shortly after there was a review of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to see how pension plans in Canada, among other things, conformed with the charter. That committee also reported and recommended major changes to pension plans in Canada, including the public sector pension plans.

The government of the day responded to those two committee reports. It brought in the Pension Benefits Standards Act which applies to all federally regulated employers and their pension plans and told them what standards private sector pension plans had to meet. It did not and has not to this date brought its own public sector pension plans into conformity with that act.

Once again it is the government saying to everybody else in Canada: "This is what you have to do, but we can ignore our own laws; we can ignore our own rules".

It changed the Canada Pension Plan to meet the standards the committees having reviewed the plans had recommended. But while Public Service employees, Armed Forces employees and RCMP personnel continued to contribute generously to their pension plans, those pension plans continued not to meet the basic test of fairness that the government imposed on private

sector plans and that it had implemented for the Canada Pension Plan.

The government continues to say "trust us". The government continues to say that it will sit down with employees, will review the pension plans, will see where changes and improvements need to be made, and will do it jointly and in partnership. Those are words the government uses very nicely but seems to have a hard time living by.

Let me make it clear why there is no trust on this issue. There is no trust because it is now close to a decade that people have waited for the pension plans to be brought into conformity with the recommendations of two major parliamentary committees and into conformity with the government's own legislation.

It is now nearly a decade that they have been waiting for the government to legislate a fair rate of return on the \$73 billion worth of pension funds that Public Service employees, Armed Forces personnel and RCMP personnel contribute. It is now nearly a decade they have been waiting for some say in the management of their own money. But the government unilaterally continues to decide what the benefits are, what the contributions are, what the rate of return to the fund is, and continues to cheat people contributing to these plans of a fair rate of return on their own money.

It is now seven years since the President of the Treasury Board promised the review, five years since he promised it again, three years since he promised it the third and fourth times, and now six months since the latest President of the Treasury Board has promised a review.

Not one step has been taken to consult with the pensioners or to consult with the people, whose money we are talking about, to conduct that review. Why should there be any trust?

It is no wonder that people who have watched this process carefully and who have waited patiently for improvements and fairness in their pension plan, as the government has dictated for other pension plans, say that this is a government that operates by stealth, by hidden agendas, by secretive decision making, by subterfuge and by double-dealing. This bill demonstrates that very clearly.