

Pension Act

work to do and it is important, in order that the board of transport commissioners may retain the confidence of the people who appear before them, that they should be completely independent. Their salaries are set by statute and an increase was provided for them during the 1951 session. I have here chapter 22 which amended the Railway Act and which was introduced during the second session of parliament in 1951. There we find that the new section 26, subsection 1, written into the Railway Act reads as follows:

The chief commissioner shall be paid an annual salary equal to the salary of the President of the Exchequer Court; the assistant chief commissioner shall be paid an annual salary of fourteen thousand dollars, the deputy chief commissioner shall be paid an annual salary of thirteen thousand dollars, and each of the other commissioners shall be paid an annual salary of twelve thousand dollars.

In the minister's own department there is another board similar to the pension commission which has salaries set by statute. I refer to the war veterans allowance board. The salaries of the members of that board are not set by order in council, but are written into the War Veterans Allowance Act. If that is justifiable, and I think it is, then the salaries of the board of pension commissioners should be treated in exactly the same fashion.

Once again I urge the Prime Minister and the members of the government to take a second look at this particular section. Some of them at least must realize that they are running a grave risk of weakening the standing of the Canadian pension commission in this country by making this change. Every one of them must realize that this is a derogation of the rights of parliament and that it is against the best interests of the veterans of this nation.

Some hon. Members: Question.

The Chairman: Is the committee ready for the question?

Mr. Drew: Mr. Chairman, I have listened attentively in the hope that we would have one word of explanation as to why there should be a departure from the ordinary practice of fixing the amount paid to those who will serve the people on appointment by the government in this case. But not one single reason or justification of any kind for this departure from the established practice has been put forward.

The statements that have been made have in no way answered the suggestion that the minister should tell us why this is necessary. Has any member of the board of pension commissioners said that he was going to resign because of the present salary? Is there any person about to be appointed who

will not be appointed if the salaries remain as they are? These would be reasons if the minister could state that that was so. If it is not so, and there requires to be an increase, then let him say so:

But not one reason has been put forward. If the idea that the government can deal more easily with those persons under an arrangement of this kind is to be taken as a valid arrangement then is it possible that the reason we have not got the bill to amend the Judges Act before us is that the government is perhaps going to fix the salaries of the judges by order in council? Do not let the Minister of Justice laugh. This is just as much a departure from the established practice as would be the decision to fix the salaries of the judges by order in council.

We have been wondering why that bill, which was announced so long ago, is still withheld from the knowledge of members of parliament. Is that the reason? If this is such a good reason then is the government going to come before us and say they would have a chance of getting better admirals, better generals, and better air marshals if they were able to deal privately with these senior men by order in council?

An hon. Member: It would be more flexible.

Mr. Drew: It would be more flexible, there is no question about that. But the very asking of that question indicates the extent to which we would break down the authority of parliament over those senior officials who carry out the functions which are allotted to them by parliament itself.

Before we are called upon to vote on a clause of this kind, Mr. Chairman, the minister should give some explanation. No explanation of any kind has been given. There can be no possible answer to the people of Canada if we are called upon to vote in committee, as the situation stands, except that the government bit by bit is whittling away at the authority of parliament and without explanation is going to use their majority to impair the rights of parliament still further.

Mr. Castleden: Mr. Chairman, if a person looked around this house this evening and attempted to find out what all the debate was about he would probably find it in what has been said here so often, namely that the rights of members of parliament who represent the people are being infringed upon. The surest sign that the government is losing touch with the people is when it attempts to endanger the democratic processes of parliament and curtail the power of the members sent here who have as much right to