

Supplementary Retirement Benefits Act (No. 2)

That is exactly what Bill C-133 is all about. It is not law so much as a public relations job. After spending the country into bankruptcy over the last 14 years, the Government has suddenly chosen to make restraint the rallying cry in its fight to win back public support. People can see behind the facade of this feigned conversion. They are not easily duped. They can see the facade and duplicity for what they are. They recognize instinctively the essential unfairness of legislation like Bill C-133.

My riding of Hillsborough, which is in the capital city area of Prince Edward Island, contains many federal public employees, as well as provincial Government civil servants. I know a lot of them personally and others at least as acquaintances. My work as a Member of Parliament requires me to work hand in hand with these people and with their counterparts elsewhere in the Atlantic region, especially in regional head offices, and in Ottawa. My experience is that public employees are the most maligned group in society, no doubt in part because their own public relations leave a lot to be desired. They are commonly perceived as underworked, overpaid, and too plentiful for all the good they do. But the truth is, we in Canada have the best Public Service in the world, with the possible exception of Britain, from which ours has inherited much of its tradition of dedication and professionalism.

The extent to which the public takes the Public Service for granted is, in reality and paradoxically, a measure of how efficiently our public employees do their job—unobtrusively yet competently. By the same token, only when they are on strike do we sometimes realize how dependent we are on the services these people provide. Proportionately, Government harbours as many diligent and competent and qualified employees as can be found in any field in the country. I defy anyone to demonstrate otherwise.

Similarly, the machine-like efficiency typically associated with employees in large corporations in the private sector is no less out of whack with reality than the less favourable public image of public servants. I am convinced that just as the public wrongly perceives public servants as slackers, as underworked and overpaid and too plentiful, so also the public's perception of employees in the private sector, for different reasons, is wrong. I do not have the time on this occasion to delve into the issue, except to invite people who think otherwise to examine some of the literature in political science, in management studies and in sociology. Read the studies on North American corporate management that seriously throw into question the common assumption that private enterprise has a patent on competence. Some of the business giants most familiar to North Americans are, in fact, riddled with incompetents, from the lowest echelons to the million dollar-a-year chief executive officers. The Chrysler Corporation is a case in point.

By requiring public employees, including the retired, to bear the load of its restraint program, instead of including them in an over-all wage and price strategy, which would make more sense, the Government is both reflecting and contributing to the conventional myth that those people are responsible for the double digit inflation in the country. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The blame rests squarely with the political

mismangers in the federal Cabinet, especially the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), who has been calling the shots for the past 14 years. At the heart of the inflation problem, in particular, has been the Government's 14-year spending spree that has seen Government expenditures soar an incredible 630 per cent since the Prime Minister took office in 1968. The deficit of the federal Government this year is some \$12 billion more than the total budget of the Government in the Prime Minister's first year in office.

The share of the total public debt of the country borne by each Canadian taxpayer, now amounts to \$14,100, quite apart from their personal, individual debts. This year alone, the cost of servicing the public debt will be \$700 for every man, woman and child in the country. Is it any wonder that the Government is now having to borrow money just to pay the interest on previous borrowings? Mr. Speaker, if you or I or any other Canadian conducted our personal finances the way the Government runs the country as a matter of course, we would have long since been forced into personal bankruptcy, or jail, or both.

Having increased its total spending this past year by some 20 per cent, having racked up a deficit of \$24 billion in the current year alone—100 per cent higher than forecast as recently as seven months earlier—the Government now expects pensioners to settle for annual increases of no more than 6 and 5 per cent in the benefits which they themselves made possible through deductions in their paycheques when in the active work force.

A pension without built in protection against inflation is a prescription for poverty. Actuarial experts—and I do not pretend to be one—have made it abundantly clear that the average male retiring with a fixed income at age 65, with inflation raging at its current rate of 10 per cent per year, will have his real pension benefit slashed to one-quarter of its original value by the time he dies. A fully indexed pension is not a bonanza. It is not like winning the Irish sweepstakes. It is not like a Liberal appointment to the Senate. It is simply an assurance that a pensioner, struggling to make ends meet, will be able to purchase something close to the same basket of goods, through his or her retirement years. Is that too much to ask for someone who has served the country well over a long career? Surely a country as great, as wealthy and as inherently bountiful in its resources as Canada can do no less for its pensioners.

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The concept of indexing has been allowed to become virtually a four letter word, especially when applied to public sector wages and pensions. The same thing is true with Family Allowances and other benefits which a civilized society should take for granted. Yet the very people who most vocally condemn the concept of indexing can and do in fact protect themselves in a similar, very analogous way against inflation. Business and professional people, for example, do so through