

Pension Act

Mr. Abbott: If my hon. friend had been here and listened he would realize that the answer has been given two or three times already.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Casselman: When did you come in?

Mr. Lennard: How long have you been here?

Mr. Fulton: If an answer has been given, and if the answer is a valid one, then why should the Minister of Finance be unwilling to have it repeated? But he says "don't answer" because he knows there is no valid answer. I suppose we are left with the situation as it has existed so often before, that where the affairs of veterans are concerned, as where the affairs of so many others of the Canadian people are concerned, control is to be removed from the House of Commons and from parliament and to be invested in the governor in council, the government. That may be the formula of words advanced by the government in explanation of this provision, but I assure you, sir, that it is not a satisfactory answer to us in the official opposition and will not be accepted as a satisfactory answer by the veterans and the people of this country.

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Green: I have been very disappointed that we have had no word of support for this proposed change from one government supporter on the veterans affairs committee. We had the parliamentary assistant there; we had the hon. member for Spadina and we had many other leading lights from the government side of the house. And yet not one of those hon. members has stood up in this debate to try to justify this change because they know it cannot be justified.

We have had the minister stand up and try to justify it. The minister did not attend the meetings of the committee very often; he was there once or twice. There have been ministers of veterans affairs who have attended all the meetings of the veterans affairs committees. I recall that the late Right Hon. Ian Mackenzie invariably—

Mr. Lapointe: I did not think you could be so small.

Mr. Green: —attended meetings of the veterans affairs committee and took great interest in them. The present Minister of Veterans Affairs does not even bother to do that.

An hon. Member: Dirty!

Mr. Abbott: Shame!

[Mr. Fulton.]

Mr. Green: The Minister of Finance is interrupting here to give his views about what other people should do. Let him stand on his feet once in a while and make a proper interjection so we may be able to deal with him.

Mr. Abbott: He will stand on his feet when he needs to.

Mr. Green: Here we have government members who were actually on that committee and who sat in on all the proceedings and yet not one will get up on his feet to justify this change.

An hon. Member: They are ashamed.

Mr. Green: Of course they are ashamed. When the minister spoke he let the cat out of the bag.

Mr. MacDougall: A tom cat?

Mr. Green: Some cat is right. He explained why they are making the change. He wants to raise the salaries of the pension commissioners and he is adopting this method of doing so. He could very easily have written into the bill before he presented it to the house the amount he wishes to pay the pension commissioners. That has been the course that has been followed in other years. But he did not bother to do that. He wanted this flexible method of doing it through the cabinet. Members of the house will then have no control.

He then compared the pension commissioners to senior civil servants and in doing so he demonstrated his utter failure to realize the judicial nature of this pension commission. The pension commission is not an administrative body. The administrative work in the Department of Veterans Affairs is carried out by the deputy minister and his assistants. The pension commission is a judicial body but despite this fact the minister gets up in this house and attempts to compare the pension commission with senior civil servants who are doing administrative work. That is exactly where we part company with the minister on this suggestion—

Mr. Lapointe: I did nothing of the sort.

Mr. Green: —that salaries should be set by the governor in council rather than by parliament. He failed entirely to appreciate the fact that one other similar board under our governmental structure, namely the board of transport commissioners, have their salaries set by statute. Just a year or so ago we increased the salaries of the members of the board of transport commissioners, which is a body very much like the board of pension commissioners. It has a great deal of judicial