

Members' Retiring Allowances

terms at this moment. We adopted the best judgment of the group of members who originated the plan. We had it examined as presented to the committee, and we believe that the plan today is sound. If the matter is restudied by any group of members and another plan can be presented which is also sound I am sure the government will be glad to consider it, but I do not think the government would consider it unless it can be shown that it is an actuarially sound pension plan.

Mr. MacInnis: Mr. Chairman, probably my only reason for saying a word now is to demonstrate that now and again a subject does come before the house on which I do not find myself opposed to the government. As a matter of fact during the session when the retiring allowances bill was introduced I think the only speech I made was in support of that bill. I am still convinced that it is good legislation. However, as my leader says, I do not think that we have done a good public relations job in regard to it. I think the general feeling in the country is that members receive the retiring allowance without making any contributions themselves.

During the recent election campaign I received a letter from a constituent who was very irate on the subject. She said that for the first time in many years she was not going to vote for me. I did not feel greatly concerned, because I had an idea that there would be plenty of votes besides hers. But after the election was over I took the time to write and give her certain figures with respect to my own account in the fund. She is a fair-minded woman, and she apologized by the next mail. I believe that feeling is fairly general throughout the country. People do not follow what we do here as closely as we sometimes think, and if they do they forget.

The hon. member for Kamloops raised the point that there should be an age limit for receiving the retiring allowance. I do not believe that we should do that. Probably it does seem rather generous to provide pensions for members who retire at the age of, say, 45, but it must be remembered that if a member is eligible for the pension at that age he has spent his life from the age of 22 or 23 as a member of parliament, and that is the period when other people are working and making provision for their own future. In my opinion such a man is more entitled to the pension than a person who enters politics at a later age.

The matter of pensions for widows is not part of the bill before us, but other members have said a word about it and I should like to say something also. If it can be

[Mr. Howe (Port Arthur).]

done through contributions by the members themselves I am all in favour of it. It would be a good move for the members. But I wish we could approach subjects of this kind without either feeling sorry for ourselves or for our future widows who are no more deserving of a pension than any other widows in Canada. Who is going to provide pensions for the widows of farmers in the constituency of the hon. member for Simcoe North? Who is going to provide pensions for the widows of the longshoremen in my constituency? These women have all done something for Canada. They have raised Canada's children to manhood and womanhood, and if there is any group more worthy of attention I should like to know who they are.

I say again that I wish we could approach these matters without feeling sorry for ourselves. In my opinion there is no reason why a member of parliament should feel sorry for himself or for his wife and possibly future widow. I believe the wives of members of parliament are enjoying themselves. I know my wife is, and I daresay the others are. They get opportunities that many other wives throughout the country do not get.

Mrs. Shipley: I should like to say a few words on this subject. I think I am particularly well fitted to speak on it. This is my first year in parliament, and it is highly improbable that I will ever be re-elected four or five times and serve some 17 years. I am a widow, so one might say that I have nothing to gain from anything that may be done here. I feel very keenly, and agree with the statements made by some hon. members, that this measure has been very poorly explained to the people of Canada. I was under the impression, as most other people are, that a member got a wonderful pension and that he did not have to do very much to earn it. But there will be a very small percentage of the members of the house who will ever earn the full pension, and if a member is not elected at least three times he gets no pension at all.

When I learned further that the widows receive nothing I was somewhat shocked. I think any pension or insurance plan to which we contribute in large measure ourselves should make some provision for the widows. After all, I think it would be fair to say that with very few exceptions the members of this house are the only wage earners in their families. As long as we are alive most of us will still be able to earn something