

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 15, 1954

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

THE LATE MISS AGNES MACPHAIL

TRIBUTES TO FORMER MEMBER FOR
SOUTHEAST GREY

Mrs. Ellen L. Fairclough (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, it is fitting that mention should be made today of the passing from the Canadian scene of one of Canada's most beloved and colourful individuals, one who held a unique position in public life. Agnes Campbell Macphail came into this house in 1921, the year of the first general election which extended universal adult suffrage. A candidate for the United Farmers of Ontario, her entry into parliament at the youthful age of 30 saw her well embarked upon a parliamentary career which lasted for 19 years in this house and subsequently for two terms in the legislature of the province of Ontario.

Agnes Macphail was an example and an inspiration to all women whose interest lies in public affairs, and the record which she established has paved the way undoubtedly for those women who sit in this house and in the other place. Indeed, I think it is no exaggeration to say that her example made it possible for many women to take their places in elective offices at all levels of government. Her keen wit, coupled with her sympathetic nature, made her a formidable ally of all those causes which aroused her interest. Her memory will long be green in the hearts of those who were privileged to know her, and the name of Agnes Macphail will go down in Canadian history as an honest and courageous public figure who lent colour and substance to Canadian politics.

Mr. M. J. Coldwell (Rosetown-Biggart): I want to express my appreciation to the hon. member for Hamilton West for enabling us to pay tribute to the late Agnes Macphail. The hon. member for Temiscouata (Mr. Pouliot) spoke to me and suggested it might be done, but I thought perhaps it might not be in accordance with our usual procedure. I am glad indeed that the opportunity was provided.

All I wish to say is that those of us in this house, regardless of party, who were associated with Miss Agnes Macphail came to have an affection for her and a very high regard for her sincerity of purpose. I think

she will long be remembered as an outstanding member of this house who was largely responsible for promoting the idea of penitentiary reform. And those of us who sat with her here will always remember her keen interest in the welfare of those who were incarcerated in our prisons and penitentiaries.

In her passing, as has already been said, Canada has lost a famous woman and an outstanding citizen, one who served her country well. Often many people disagreed with her point of view, but none will withhold from her that admiration and respect which she earned by her work for the public generally and particularly for the women of Canada.

Hon. W. E. Harris (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I agree that on occasion the practice and custom of the house might be departed from, and particularly when we are paying tribute to the first woman elected to the House of Commons. Miss Macphail was proud of that, not on her own account but rather because she looked upon her election to the house as the beginning of what she hoped would be reform in the public life of Canada so that women would take a more active part in political discussion and in the elective offices.

I know that on occasion she thought that perhaps she had not succeeded. Well, the fact of the matter is that even if it is only in this parliament that we have had a fair representation from the ladies, it is a fact that in all political parties there are far more women taking part today than was the case when she entered this house.

Miss Macphail was, as everyone knows, my predecessor in Southeast Grey and in Grey-Bruce. I had known her for a good many years, and had a deep admiration for her qualities of intelligence, her sincerity and her desire to speak on behalf of the person who perhaps did not have the facilities to do so himself. She was an outstanding advocate of causes which needed an advocate, and I am sure that she and many others who shared similar views are responsible for a good deal of the progress which has been made in this country in the past thirty years. I wish to pay this tribute to her not only in a public sense, because anyone who serves in the House of Commons for 19 years, and then in the legislature of Ontario for a further five years, undoubtedly has contributed much to the welfare of the Canadian