

Mr. Coaker's Speech on Old Age Pensions for All Fishermen Over 75

Manly and Straightforward Appeal for Justice to Our Fishermen.

400 More Pensions Required.—Suggests Pension Fund for Civil Servants

MR. COAKER.—I have much pleasure in supporting what the honorable member for Bonavista has said, and I think it would be well to ask the Government to grant another \$20,000. Why not take the \$23,000 you would have to spend on the tuberculosis campaign and add it to the Old Age Pension Vote and divide it amongst the old men of the country. You have started well; and now you ought to continue the good work. There are more than 400 men in this country over seventy-five years of age not receiving the pension of \$50. Include in your pension lists all these men who are looking to you for provision for their old age. You cannot spend the money in a better way. You have just come in and asked for a pension of \$620 for a lady, an estimable lady, Miss Southcott, late Nursing Superintendent at the General Hospital; and the pension is given. If you can do things like that you ought to be able to go further and grant pensions to these old men, men over 75, who are seeking it to-day. You ought to be able to find the money; if you want to put five cents on something later on to compensate for this expenditure, I will have no hesitation in supporting it. Give us \$20,000 to help these old men who have been looking to you for the past three or four years to do something for them. Why not take up the whole 1,600 of them and be done with it. I know the Premier has a warm place in his heart for these old people, these 400 aged men, who are entitled to be put on the pension list; will he not do something for them? If you cannot do anything better take the \$20,000 that you would have given to Dr. Rendell and let it go towards Old Age Pensions.

Is This \$25,000 For Tuberculosis Necessary?
I have no desire to make any opposition to this vote. All I want to make sure of is that it is properly spent. If there is any reason why this vote of \$25,000 should be continued for tuberculosis, I certainly shall not object; but the matter as explained to this House last year was unsatisfactory. Last year there was \$8,000 spent, which in my opinion was not justifiable. The Doctor himself gets, I understand, four or five thousand dollars. Why don't you cut that out. He wouldn't die. I understand he is a man very well to do. That \$5,000 would pay one hundred Old Age Pensions of \$50 per year.
I have certainly no objection to the Government voting this money to help these people, only we want to be assured that they are being helped. What we want is returns. If you cannot get these satisfactorily, the vote ought to be dropped and one for Old Age Pensions substituted in its place. All I want is a vote of \$20,000 to provide the remaining 400 aged fishermen, who have served their country well, and are now not in a position to do more.
Unfair Method of Pensioning in Civil Service.
I would just like to say a word or two in reply to the Rt Honorable the Premier. He has made two statements with which I cannot altogether agree; and as the points raised by them are, both from the viewpoint of this side of the House and in the opinion of the Fishermen's Union, very important, I wish to make a few observations thereon. The Premier in his address justified in every possible way the pensioning of civil servants, and drew distinctions between pensioning civil servants and paying an amount to old age fishermen

With regard to civil service pensions: a great many of the men thus pensioned do not deserve them and have not earned them, and should not get them. A man to-day may enter the civil service at the age of sixty-five; he is generally worn out before he is placed in the position; he remains there for four or five years and at the end of that time he is pensioned at two-thirds his salary. Because such a man had a certain amount of political pull he is placed in the civil service; and it is not fair to class him with a man who entered the service far earlier in life just because he has reached the age when pensions are allotted. Such a man should not receive a pension of two-thirds his salary and be thus placed on the same level with the man who entered the service at the age of 25 and remained there till he was 75.
Suggests the Establishment of a Pension Fund.
We have always contended that that principle is wrong and we have suggested that the Government should institute some scheme for the creation of a fund in connection with civil service pensions. The establishment of such a fund would mean that every man would contribute so much of his salary to the fund from which his pension would be drawn; and when the time arrived for the apportioning of his pension—when he had come to a certain age—he would be entitled to a specified retiring allowance, but only in proportion to the amount which he had paid into the fund. Take the case of clergymen for instance! We never hear of any application from these men for Old Age Pensions; they are public men; they do far better work than many men in the civil service; their labors are in a great many instances arduous and unceasing; and

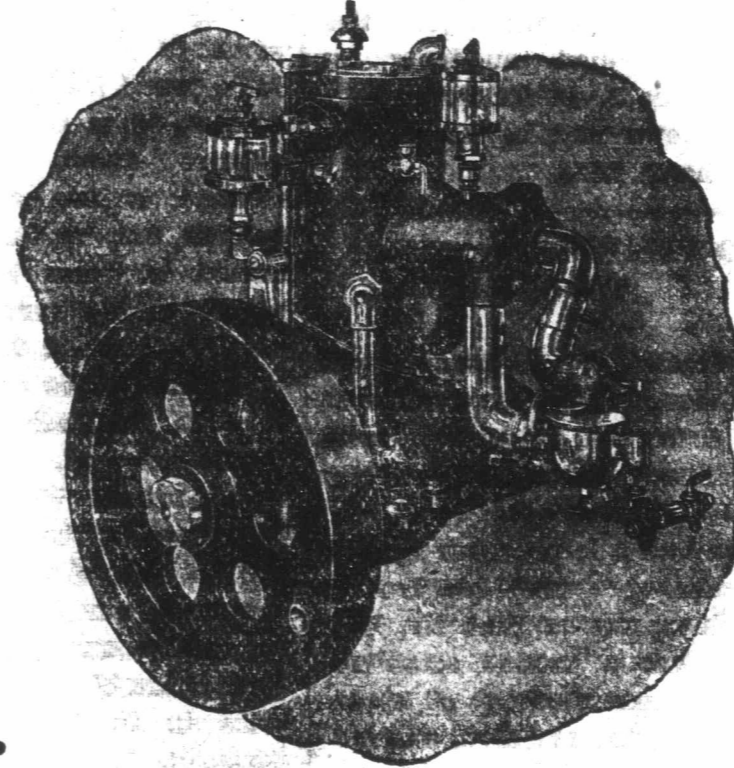
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yet when they come to old age and their days of self-support are over, we never see or hear of them petitioning for Old Age Pensions.

RT. HON. PRIME MINISTER—They hope for a reward in another world and look forward to that alone.

MR. COAKER—We all hope for a reward in another world. There are clergymen in this country to-day, some of them 80 years of age, who are drawing comfortable pensions. Why? The pensions do not come from the Government; they come from the fund towards which these clergymen have been contributing since they entered the Ministry. Such a fund as this should be established in the civil service; the scheme presents no difficulties; and it might be carried out very easily. But before being entered upon it should be given great consideration for it would necessarily have to be properly elaborated. It seems to me to be the fairest plan to adopt.

Many Are Pensioned to Make Way For Party Supporters.

Let every man put a certain proportion of his income into the fund, and when he arrives at a certain age let him receive a pension in proportion to what he has paid in. In any case, the State as of right should look after its servants and State aid should be added to such contributions of the officials; and I believe the plan thus outlined would be effective. I also wish to speak about the method of allotting pensions. Allow me to quote a case in point: A certain sub-collector at Fogo was, some time ago, pensioned. He was very well able to work and there was no necessity for retiring him; but the Government wanted to get him out of the way to put a party-supporter in his place; and so they gave him a pension of \$400 and retired him. But what did this man do?

Why, he started out teaching school! He, an old-age pensioner, went up to a small settlement and opened a school! He had saved during his time as sub-collector a sum of four or five thousand dollars; and was in very comfortable circumstances.

RT. HON. PRIME MINISTER—What case was that?

MR. COAKER—It was one that occurred some years ago; it did not happen in your administration; you were not bad enough to do that.

RT. HON. PRIME MINISTER—I thought so.

MR. COAKER—This old man died and left an estate worth four or five thousand dollars. I know of another case that took place in the Department of Public Work. I know you pensioned a man there when there was no reason for so doing.

RT. HON. PRIME MINISTER—He had applied for a pension three years previously.

MR. COAKER—I do not know whether he applied for it or not; he should not have got it; he was a strong, healthy man, able to get over Water Street as fast as I can to-day; he was quite capable of doing his work, but another man wanted his job—someone else got it—and he was pensioned. I do not agree with these things. You should never have given that man a pension whether he asked for it, or not as long as his health was good.

Challenges Correctness of Premier's Statement.

The Prime Minister said that civil servants could make lots of money if they were not told they were going to be looked after in their old age; he said that if some of them choose to be dishonest they could make their salaries in an hour—that they could sell out the State. I do not agree with him. Take the case of Customs officials: it is not

so easy for Customs officers to be dishonest; everything has to be correct; there is a splendid system of auditing accounts; and a man has to be a pretty clever man if he is going to defraud the Customs because he can, and will be found out. Anyway, most of them are too honest to do it. A man came to me when I was sub-collector and said: "I hear you, as Customs Officer, get 20% of all duties collected on goods entering this port. Now you give me 10% and I will get all the goods possible brought in here." I said, "There is the door—go."

RT. HON. PRIME MINISTER—But they are not all Coakers; we all could not be subjected to such temptation and come through unscathed.

MR. COAKER—You never spoke a truer word.

You see a man named John Brown living in one place and right next door to him is another man named John Jones. Both of them are 75 years of age; both of them have raised families; paid their merchant 100 cents in the dollar and now they have no means of support. You make arrangements to give one man \$50.00 a year and the other man next door gets nothing. He has done the same thing for the Colony; he has raised his family; he has worked just as hard and he has just as much right to get that \$50.00 as the other, \$50.00 a year is a splendid help to these old men. It is a great assistance to them in every way. Now are you going to allow that state of affairs to continue if you can get \$20,000 more anywhere at all.

All Who Reach the Age of 75 Should Be Given Pension.

All these men are entitled to a pension. They are entitled to it as a right, and not as a favour. Under the present system it is given to them as a favour. I

say give it to them as a right, it belongs to them and if the right exists it ought to be given to every aged fisherman. He has assisted the Colony in every way; he has reached the age of 75, and you say that you will give it to Jack but not to Tom. You have not right to leave one of them to a pauper relief. I know one of these old men spoke to me before the election. He said to me "Is my name on the list?" and I said "No, it is not." Then he said "Why isn't it?" So I asked him if he got relief and he said "Yes, I get \$3.00 a quarter," so I to him, "Your name is not on the list because you are a pauper," so he looked at me and said: "Me, a pauper. I have been going to the Labrador for 50 years. I have brought home 33 loads of codfish, and because in my old age I have come to that condition where I need assistance, because my merchant has seized my vessel, and I have no way of earning a living when I am 83 years old I get \$12.00 from the country and you will not give me a vote." I think that is a most awful thing.

A Story Only Too Familiar

That old man was 83 years old; he had fallen into misfortune. His merchant had seized his property and had thrown him on the world. He got \$12.00 a year out of the revenue and he had no vote, while that man at Fogo, who was getting \$400 pension and had put away \$6000, had the vote, and was called a gentleman. John Warren was getting \$12.00 and had no vote, while Mr. Lucas could walk in and vote as often as he lived. Such is the system that we oppose. It is unfair. It must be altered.

The Brute!

She—"Did you like those biscuits I baked for breakfast this morning?" He—"Yes, indeed. Why, they were almost good enough to eat."