

Royal Canadian Mounted Police

When this case was brought to the attention of the minister last year, in reply to my letter to him he sent me a copy of a letter which he had written to the hon. leader of the opposition in regard to the matter, from which I wish to quote briefly:

Unfortunately there is no provision in the Mounted Police Act authorizing the payment of any pension to the widow of a non-commissioned officer or constable of the force, who is either qualified for pension by length of service, or who was in receipt of a pension at the time of his death, and it would be necessary to introduce legislation to provide for pensions to widows of non-commissioned officers and constables, and I have had this under consideration for some time.

The widows of officers are provided for in the Police Act, and they are entitled to receive a pension equal to one-half of that to which the late husband was entitled, or was in receipt of at the time of his death. Small compassionate allowances are also granted to the fatherless children. The officers, however, contribute to the officers' pension fund an amount equal to five per cent of their salary. The non-commissioned officers and constables make no contribution to their pension.

The minister here draws attention to the fact that the officers contribute 5 per cent of their salary to a pension fund and that the non-commissioned officers and constables make no such contribution. That is the only point apparently which he raises in defence, perhaps I might say, of the policy of the department, in making a distinction between the wives of officers and the wives of private constables. It seems to me that that is too small an amount to be taken into consideration in discussing a matter of this kind. As the minister himself stated a year ago in this letter, he had this matter under consideration, and to quote his own words, "Unfortunately there is no provision in the Mounted Police Act authorizing the payment of any pension to the widow of a non-commissioned officer or constable of the force." I want to ask the minister if he will not even at this late date amend this act so that these few widows might be pensioned. I think it is a reflection on the authorities in this country and on the country itself that the widows of these old veterans are not pensioned. There are not very many of them, and it would not be very difficult for the minister to make provision for them. As the act stands at the present time, it seems to me that there is a clear case of discrimination between the widows of officers and the widows of non-commissioned officers and constables. I am going to make a plea to the minister to amend this act so that these few widows who are still with us might be pensioned.

Mr. LAPOINTE: My hon. friend has himself indicated the distinction between the case
[Mr. Coote.]

of the officers and of the men. The officers contribute a substantial part of their salary for the purpose of creating a pension fund, just as the civil servants do under the Civil Service Act, and their widows receive part of the pension the officer would have drawn. In both cases there is a contribution. But the non-commissioned officers and constables in the mounted police force make no contribution for pension. My hon. friend says that this would involve only a few. I would point out that it would involve all those who will become widows in the future. It would not be a special provision to cover just the present cases, but would be permanently in the law and would apply to all widows in the future. I wonder whether a pension system could not be devised to cover the widows of the non-commissioned officers and men. Of course, the men are not receiving a very large salary and I do not know whether they would be willing to agree to a certain deduction from their salary toward the pension fund. If we did not do it that way, we would certainly be creating a precedent. It would be a new system altogether, and it may be a case in which such a new system should be adopted. I am quite willing to study the case, but it will have to be dealt with by special legislation quite independent of this bill.

Mr. WOODSWORTH: I want to support the position taken by the hon. member for Macleod (Mr. Coote). It does not seem to me that the minister's answer is fully satisfactory. It may very well be that we have to create a precedent in doing this; but why not create it if it is right? It is true that in the past the private members of the force have not been contributing to such a fund. But why not have the fund established? If their pay is not sufficient at the present time to contribute to the fund, it may be necessary to raise it. If it is necessary, it would seem to indicate that in the past they had not been paid sufficient to enable them to contribute to such a fund, in which case it is only reasonable and just that the pension should be paid whether they contributed or not. The commissioned officers do not contribute the whole of the amount which they receive in pensions, but it is presumed that they get sufficiently high pay to enable them to contribute to the pension fund. If we have been paying the privates too low a salary, it is only doing them justice now to take care of their widows in a respectable sort of way. I confess I do not like to have legislation of this character brought forward again and again. We had another measure before the house this session of the same character with regard to the pen-