

Pension Act

Apart from my first submission entirely, I submit that for the sake of parliament itself, this change should not be made. We have not had a free parliament in this country from 1939 until the end of May when the Emergency Powers Act went off the statute books. This parliament has been under the thumb of the cabinet since 1939, so why in June, 1954, should the cabinet seek to take away from parliament the power to set the salaries of the Canadian pension commission? This move is nothing more nor less than an affront to parliament and I can see no reason why we should agree to a change of this kind being made.

As a matter of fact, the government members on the committee were put under a great strain in trying to justify the change. One of them, and one alone, had the courage to stand up and take his stand against it. All the rest of the Liberal members of the committee voted to bring about the change. The arguments that they put up—really, I have never seen some of these able parliamentarians like the hon. member for Spadina put to such great trouble to try to make arguments that even could be listened to let alone taken as being logical. They said this change is unimportant; there is nothing to this change. Why not do some of the important things? The hon. member for Vancouver South said, why bother about this little thing? What we want to do is to increase the war veterans allowances.

Mr. Knowles: Hear, hear.

Mr. Green: He knew very well that the government would not allow this committee to even consider the war veterans allowance, let alone raise it. When that matter was under consideration in this house he did not get up and say he wanted the allowances considered. He was on the side of the government at that time.

Mr. Philpott: On a question of privilege; if my hon. friend will look at the speech I made when we were considering raising the indemnities of members of this house, he will see that I said very clearly I would much prefer to be voting for an increase in the war veterans allowance or the old age pension.

Mr. Green: Why did the hon. member not say that when the members of all opposition parties were trying to get the powers of this committee extended to consider war veterans allowances? He was strangely silent then about war veterans allowances. However, in the committee that was his argument, that he did not want to be bothered with these

[Mr. Green.]

pension commissioners' salaries; he was all for rushing in to get the war veterans allowance increased.

The hon. member for Spadina, and one or two of his other colleagues who dared to say anything at all said, why this is going to improve the administration of the Pension Act; it is going to be much easier to get salaries raised if we do not have to go to parliament. We will be able to get it done much quicker. There will not be a lot of fuss about it. It will be all over, and then it will be possible to spend our time on something else. This administrative argument about changing more quickly, well they rang the changes on that. And that was about the only argument they had, as a matter of fact. There was nothing else they could think of to justify it.

And I will be very much interested to hear what the Minister of Veterans Affairs has to say this evening to justify these changes. And I would like to ask the hon. member for Spadina to get up and tell us how he justifies this change being made. Let some of these other members get up and say to the house what they are saying around the corridors about this change. Let us hear them justify it; let us hear them justify taking away from parliament the right to set the salaries of the pension commissioners.

Mr. Abbott: Let us get the auction going again!

Mr. Green: Oh, the Minister of Finance may think this is funny.

Mr. Abbott: No; I just said, "Let us get the auction going again."

Mr. Green: Never mind the auction. This is not particularly funny for over a million veterans in Canada.

Mr. Abbott: We must be fair to the taxpayers as well as to the veterans.

Mr. Harkness: This does not affect the taxpayers at all.

Mr. Green: I do suggest this: Let the Prime Minister give his followers the freedom to vote as they see fit. Let him get up and tell the house that the life of the government is not at stake, and then let the Liberal members vote as they see fit. I will be very much interested to see how they vote, if he will put them in that position. There can be no excuse for enforcing party discipline on a question of this kind.

There is only one reason for making this change, and that is that it is intended to raise the salaries of the pension commissioners, and the government does not want