

*Statute Law Amendment Act, 1970*

Seymour with reference to the political party of which I happen to be a member, that when it comes to discussing a bill of this kind it is open to us in this part of the House to discuss it as Members of Parliament and not as members with any particular political affiliation. This is the way I feel such matters should be discussed.

I rose to my feet because I felt I might forestall an impulse on the part of the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) to re-enter the debate. I am not quite sure from the exchange that took place a little earlier whether the hon. member for Timiskaming or the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis) will wear the hair-shirt. But I am sure that whichever one of them chooses to come into the House in that apparel, Mr. Speaker will consider it suitable for this corner of the chamber and we can then judge which one looks the most becoming in that attire.

I rise to speak on this amendment to deal with two points, both of which have been mentioned before, about which I have some feeling. I have always felt that as far as it is humanly possible, members of this House should have the right to make a decision on a particular issue without having to be gummed-up by extraneous issues. I should like as a member of this chamber to register my personal objection to what I can only describe as the way the government has bootlegged the whole question of the pension plan of Members of Parliament into this bill. While it is true the bill deals with pensions it is, nevertheless, not directly related to them.

I do not know why it is, but every time we deal with matters which affect our own situation, particularly from the pension point of view, we seem to be swept into a situation which generates more heat than light. Because of the action the government has taken and the way it has chosen to bring this matter before the House, I suggest it has added to the heat of the debate. I wish the government had left these issues separate and apart in order that we could appraise them individually, on their own merits. Then none of us would feel, in voting on the proposal in the first part of this bill, that we were in fact having to compromise our position in respect of the other part.

The other point I should like to touch upon, because it has been debated, is the business of combining for the purposes of this bill our indemnity and expense allowance. Ever since I have been a member of this House I have

[Mr. Barnett.]

tried to put forward the point of view that proper recognition should be given to the expenses which a member must incur in the performance of his duties both as a member of this House and in providing proper service to constituents. I have always felt that the present system, which sets a flat rate for every member of the House of Commons, is neither equitable nor fair and that this is a matter which should be considered and appropriately adjusted. I feel that by entangling our present, so-called expense allowance with our indemnity we are creating a snarl we probably will never manage to untangle, and we will never be able to take a realistic approach to the matter of expenses a member incurs in performing his function as a Member of Parliament.

Let me refer to the question of the pension proposal in respect of hon. members. In this regard I suppose my personal experience has been as varied as that of any member who currently sits in this chamber. I suggest in all seriousness that as the proposal stands we are moving very directly away from the original concept of the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act.

An hon. member quoted and commended part of a speech on the original bill by a former leader of the party to which I belonged. When I first came into this House the Hon. M. J. Coldwell was that leader. Anyone who followed that debate on the matter shortly before I entered the House—I think in 1952 the plan came into effect, and I entered the House in 1953—will realize that the whole concept of that plan was based on the concept that the longer an individual was away from the normal employment or occupation from which he made his living, the more difficult it would be to readjust to what one might call civilian life after retiring either voluntarily or involuntarily from this chamber. It was on this basis that the special provisions of the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act was developed.

No one would quarrel with the suggestion that the initial plan was not adequate. Speaking as an individual, I have no particular quarrel with the principle of the plan. When I was defeated as a member of this House in 1958, I had not been elected three times. I have no particular quarrel with the fact that the only benefit accruing to me was a refund of the amount I had personally contributed to the fund: I had not been a member of the House long enough, nor had I reached an age where it was impossible for me to re-enter employment which would earn me a living.