

Members' Retiring Allowances

in her husband's constituency. As long as the husband lives there is a mark of appreciation for the services which his wife renders, but the minute he dies his widow is aided to the door of the poorhouse.

This is the woman who kept the other home going. This is the woman who has been denied the pleasure of the company of her husband who must reside in Ottawa. This is the woman who looked after the family, who brought up children who were without a father for most of the time. This is the woman who is not being recognized under this pension scheme.

I would like to see an amendment to this pension plan so that the wives of members of parliament would be included. I apologize to no man or woman for the remuneration I receive as long as I retain my position in the House of Commons. It is the position the people vote for. If they do not see fit to send the right man here as the representative of their constituency that is their fault, not the fault of the member.

Mr. Coldwell: Mr. Chairman, may I say first of all on behalf of my colleagues, and I think of hon. members of the house generally, that we welcome this bill. I think the government has done the right thing under the circumstances in introducing it and placing a limit on the superannuation as provided for in the original act. I repeat that we welcome it.

There has been a tremendous amount of misinformation spread across the country relating to this particular superannuation plan. As the Minister of Finance said, it has proved to be actuarially sound from the beginning and is likely to remain so. Members contribute 6 per cent of their past and current indemnities in order to build up the fund, and of course there is a similar contribution by the government. Hon. members do not receive any pension if they retire from parliament before a certain time.

When this bill is before the house I think it should be noted, as the Acting Prime Minister has said, that it will require members of parliament to serve much longer in order to qualify for the maximum pension. For example, if I were to retire or were defeated I would be entitled to the full superannuation of \$3,000 provided I could raise the amount I have to pay in order to make up the total of \$4,000 and interest which I owe the government. I shall do that in time.

I have earned that right in about 14 years, during which I have been elected three times. It has been possible for me to earn the full pension in that time under the act as it is before this amendment because we had extra sessions and fractions of sessions. Altogether

they enabled me—I am using my own case—to earn the maximum pension in about 14 years.

As the Acting Prime Minister has said, under this amendment a member of parliament will have to serve 17 years for the maximum pension of \$3,000. Moreover, if this parliament continues and subsequent parliaments continue for the average that has prevailed since 1926, in order to get the maximum pension a member will have to be elected four and possibly five times in 17 years. The average has been four years for each parliament.

Mr. Ferguson: Which is crazy.

Mr. Coldwell: Consequently, in effect we are making it much more difficult for hon. members who came to this house at the beginning of this parliament to earn the maximum pension. I do not think that is understood in the country. I have had it thrown at me that members of parliament may be elected three times, retire and receive a pension of \$3,000 no matter what their age may be. When this amendment passes that statement will be absolutely wrong. I think this should be brought out this afternoon in order that the public may know.

I have supported the idea of superannuation for members of parliament for the reasons I gave when the bill was before the house in the first instance, and which I am not going to repeat. I think this is the best thing we have done, far better than increasing the indemnity.

I am going to support the hon. member for Simcoe North in his request that something be done for the widows of members. I am in the position where I speak as one who has no dependents. I would like to see, not today but perhaps later on this session, an amendment introduced, or even a separate measure, to provide something for the widows of members who were entitled to some pension. I think this should be paid for by the members themselves; I do not think there should be any imposition on the public funds of Canada. If we all agreed in this house—and again I speak as one who is entitled to the maximum pension but who is without dependents—to contribute to a fund for the benefit of widows who might be left behind, that could be built up by means of a small deduction from the annual indemnities of all members of parliament. Widows could be at least partly taken care of from that fund. I think that is something we should consider.

I am not asking the government to consider it today because when the superannuation bill was introduced into this house it was not introduced as a government measure.