

Old Age Pensions

pensions. It applies to men who have served in a theatre of war and whose health has to some extent been impaired. Whether it be through a sense of justice or whether it be gratitude for their services these men who find themselves in impecunious circumstances at the age of sixty-five should be entitled to an old age pension, but without regard to whether at an earlier stage of their life, through disabilities arising from military service, they should or should not have received military pension. I would ask the minister to consider that aspect. The purpose of this resolution is quite different; this is to provide for an old age pension, but the amendment would provide a pension for a class of men who have done a service to the nation and who, from the fact that they have seen service in the war, have attained old age at sixty-five where an ordinary man would not reach old age until seventy.

Mr. BROWN: The hon. member for Fort William has left. I wanted to ask him a question.

Mr. CLARK: He will be back in a moment; he has just gone to the telephone.

Mr. BROWN: Perhaps the hon. member for Burrard (Mr. Clark) would be able to give me an answer. I would like to know whether in the view of those supporting this amendment its immediate effect would be to take in any considerable number of men. I imagine myself that such would not be the case. It seems to me that of necessity the number of men who would immediately benefit by such a provision would be very small, and would continue to be small during the next five or ten years.

Mr. CLARK: I might inform my hon. friend that it was surprising how many enlisted men, even in the early stages of the war, were over fifty years of age.

Mr. BROWN: I quite agree that there are large numbers of men who can show no wounds but yet are physically disabled as a result of the war. One of the worst cases I ever saw had no trace of a wound, yet he was a complete nervous wreck. The question in my mind was whether this would have any immediate value.

Mr. CLARK: That is the only answer I can give the hon. member.

Mr. McGIBBON: I would like to support this suggestion, which brings up the difficulty of trying to set an age limit. Any medical man like the Minister of Health knows that many men are older at fifty than others at
[Mr. Ladner.]

sixty and seventy, due in many cases to inherent causes. For instance, the arterial condition has a pronounced effect on the length of life, and that condition runs not only through families but through generations. The mode of life would also make a difference, and there is no question at all in my mind that any man who went through the trying ordeals of the war, especially in the front line trenches, has had his span of life shortened by anywhere from five to fifteen years, and in many cases more. If this parliament is to do justice to these people who have reached that stage of their life where they can no longer earn their own living, the age limit should not be set at any particular period. The period at which this act should operate is that period when the man or woman can no longer, through physical or mental causes, earn a living. I raised the objection before and I raise it now, that seventy years of age is too late in life for this act to be of any material value. Speaking offhand I would say that from seventy-five per cent to ninety per cent of the people of this country who should benefit under this act will never do so if the age limit is left at seventy years, because dissolution will have set in long before that. If this is to be a humanitarian act we must put the age limit at such a time as will benefit the people concerned, and that must be the time when their conditions no longer allows them to earn a living. As one who served in the front line trenches and who watched the operations of the war I say that in the cases of these men the limit of their earning capacity will be reached anywhere from five to twenty years earlier than in the case of those who remained in civilian life. Consequently I think the point raised by the hon. member for Fort William is well taken and should be considered by this House. I do not say that the period should be arbitrarily fixed at five years; I do not know what period it should be fixed at and I do not think any member of this House knows. I do say, however, that if you are going to administer this act in the spirit of equity it cannot be so administered as presented to the House tonight. Consequently I have much pleasure in supporting the amendment.

Mr. SPEAKMAN: The point raised by the hon. member for East Calgary (Mr. Adshead) in this connection is a sound one, I believe. Premature old age is a war disability, as we are finding out more and more, and I believe it will have to be dealt with in the future through our pension act or through some form of assistance to old soldiers who are unable to carry on. I do not believe, however, that