

Members' Retiring Allowances

when I say that under the act as it now stands members of the House of Commons are not allowed to receive the old age pension if they qualify for retirement allowance under the act. Is it not true that members of parliament will be the only group of people in Canada who will be debarred from receiving old age pensions when they reach the age of 70?

Mr. Knowles: They get the old age pension, but that amount is deducted from their retirement allowance.

Mr. Abbott: I think the answer would be this. The plan was worked out by the actuaries on the basis that when a man reached 70 his parliamentary allowance would be reduced by the amount which he received as old age pension. One might say that he is not receiving the old age pension. In point of fact and of law of course he does receive the old age pension, but his parliamentary allowance is reduced by a corresponding amount.

Mr. Low: Yes. I get the point; but when it is all reduced to ordinary common sense is it not true that members of parliament will be the only group in Canada who will not receive—

Mr. Knowles: Don't forget the burnt-out pensioners.

Mr. Low: —the universal old age pension without having a reduction in something else?

Mr. Abbott: Members of parliament who are receiving the retiring allowance would fall within that group; that is true.

Mr. Low: There is one other thing. Does this action affect the wives or dependents of members of parliament in any way? Does this act in any of its provisions affect the wives or dependents of members?

Mr. Abbott: No; as the Acting Prime Minister indicated, there is no provision for dependents. I must say I have sometimes thought that the effect of this pension is somewhat—unintentionally, of course—misrepresented in the public mind. It is a pension plan which I believe is actuarially sound. I had been assured it was before it was brought in; but comparing it with industrial pension plans or our own civil service superannuation plan, where there are provisions for widows and dependents, this is a very much more restricted plan.

Mr. Ferguson: I am in favour of a pension plan for every man, woman and child in the Dominion of Canada, if they are Canadian citizens and they can earn and save through some method so they will not have the fear

[Mr. Low.]

of destitution in their old age. Before being elected to parliament I had the same opinion of members of parliament that I have now, namely that they were one of the most highly respected groups of men we have in Canada, and that being a member of parliament was something that nobody had to apologize for.

Mr. McIvor: Hear, hear.

Mr. Ferguson: As a young man I was associated with men who chose to offer themselves as candidates for parliament. After great difficulty with the people of their own constituencies some of them finally convinced the voters that they were qualified to fill the position known as a member of the House of Commons. When the ballots were counted these people found themselves, whether or not they were capable, the representatives of constituencies in one of the greatest countries in this world, the Dominion of Canada.

During the discussion of increased indemnities some of the hon. members were a little apologetic with respect to the remuneration they were going to receive. I have never been apologetic. Now we come to pensions. In these pensions for the individuals who chose the vocation in which we now find ourselves we are in no different position from that of any other man or woman in Canada who chose a different vocation in life. And we have to go through an election to arrive here. But the wives and the husbands of members of parliament go with the members every step of their difficult journey in being elected to the House of Commons. Speaking for my own wife, I know the telephone in our home rings so frequently that she abhors it. She hates to hear it ring because it gets on her nerves. I think this will apply to the wife of every hon. member in this house. My wife has become a pretty fair liar, too, because I say, "You go; I am not in." I cannot take all the gaff; I put half of it on her shoulders.

Those who merit high standing in this House of Commons have given much of their lives and their time and their money to their constituencies, to the people who put them here. A man may die at a fairly ripe age after having served the people. He may have been on pension for six months, and his widow is left destitute. She is a woman who walked every step of the way with him along the path of government as laid down by the Canadian people.

People should not be able to point at the widow of a man who served in this House of Commons to the very best of his ability as she is on her way to the poorhouse after she has served her country well, after she has given unstintingly of her time to the people