

this country in more ways than one. In the first place the present proposal creates the possibility of two pensions in one family. It gives a salary of between \$5,000 and \$6,000 to a husband and wife, and this the parliament of Canada, both the House of Commons and the Senate, has declared by section 36 of the Civil Service Act, to be illegal. I submit therefore that we should not at this time, in view of the present commitments of the public treasury, create a precedent such as this with full knowledge of the step we are taking. I suggest to His Honour the Speaker that he would be well advised to withdraw this item from the estimates. This would be the wisest course in the interests of Canada as a whole, as well as in the interests of the administration of law throughout the country.

There is another aspect of the question which I may briefly comment upon. These names seem to have been selected with singular lack of discrimination. I do not believe the House of Commons would make such a selection. We go down into the office to receive our cheques in payment of our sessional indemnity and to make our declaration. What do we find? The office is over-staffed and one gentleman who has very little to do sits in a chair while another man who has been there many years is not considered at all. I do not believe that reflects the mind of the House. When the Speaker acts as the medium of communication between the House and its servants, he assumes a position of judicial responsibility and in the selection of the appointees he should have regard to the general feeling of the House taken as a whole. I do not believe the Prime Minister would consider that justice was being done by the selection of one or two of these officials to the exclusion of others who, to the certain knowledge of the oldest members of the House, have greater claims. This is a disagreeable thing to stand up and speak about; yet in the very nature of things we must see to it that the House of Commons shall not become an instrument of injustice to its servants. The Speaker may err in his selections, because we have striking evidence over his own signature of his strong partisanship in the removal of thirty-four postmasters in Gaspe. Men in high, responsible positions may sometimes become partisans and it is because of that fact that I rise now, as my last act at this session, to protest against this injustice which is being done deserving public servants through discrimination. I ask the House,

[Mr. Bennett.]

regardless of politics, to assert our ancient authority—which is ours and not the Speaker's—and to determine that we who have made the laws will not break them. That is all I intend to say regarding this matter.

Mr. SPEAKER: Regarding the case of Mrs. Barbes, I desire to read to the committee the following letter:

OTTAWA, April 14, 1927.

Honourable RODOLPHE LEMIEUX,
Speaker, House of Commons,
Ottawa.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER:

I do solemnly declare that the Sunday following dissolution of parliament, last July, I was offered the position of French secretary to the Rt. Honourable Arthur Meighen, then Prime Minister of Canada, with the promise that I would be made permanent.

Yours truly,

(Signed) D. BARBES,
Secretary to the Speaker.

I repeat, I am only carrying out the promise of the Right Hon. Mr. Meighen to this lady through Senator L'Esperance, who offered her the position. There is no party bias in any of these appointments; I might say that one of the names mentioned is that of a very prominent Conservative family, but I did not hesitate, because I thought he should get that promotion. I have consulted the Board of Internal Economy and this is not done, as the hon. gentleman has said, upon the whim of the Speaker; so why exaggerate in that fashion? The Speaker comes before his masters, first the Board of Internal Economy, then the Treasury Board and finally the House of Commons, and if the House says no the Speaker will have to obey. I do not assert any undue authority; the Treasury Board has passed on this item, but it is the privilege of this House to say no, and in that case I have nothing further to say.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I am sure that in this matter His Honour the Speaker has acted, as he has just said, not only with the best of intentions but in what he regarded as a chivalrous manner. I confess, however, that I agree with my hon. friend opposite (Mr. Bennett) when he says that we are in no way bound to recognize any promises or pledges made by Mr. Meighen when he came into office, and which he himself found it impossible to carry out. I think in this matter the House should assert its rights and I hope His Honour the Speaker will be able to see his way to withdraw these names, at least for the present.