

great financial organizations and most of the business institutions of this country, although this development has attracted less publicity than a similar type of provision for the civil service. I am convinced that in the not far distant future the question of some form of contributory pension for everyone will become vitally important, because there is no one but will find, if and when he reaches old age, that his earnings have materially diminished.

Thinking on the matter, it occurred to me that I should take this opportunity to refer to a proposal which is not without precedent in the parliamentary practice of other countries, and which, when the proper time comes, we should weigh with great care. I refer to the question of whether, and under what circumstances and conditions, men who have served the state long and faithfully should not be eligible for some provision for their declining years.

As I have said, the idea is not a new one. It originated, I presume, for the reason that by custom and tradition, an individual who becomes a member of the government must dissociate himself from all business activities, particularly those which are directly or indirectly related to government administration. The whole social structure has changed so materially, and government affects so many businesses, that the requirement amounts to a prohibition of any ministerial association with private business. The high standard of rectitude and integrity which characterizes our public men, whether in the federal or the provincial field, reflects great credit upon themselves and the country. Under the law of Great Britain there is provision for pensions for ministers who have served a certain period of time.

Hon. Mr. EULER: At one time we had a similar provision.

Hon. Mr. ROBERTSON: As my honourable friend reminds me, at one time there was a similar law on our statute books. I looked up the act and read it, and the discussion in connection with it, and with the permission of honourable senators I shall make a few brief references to the debates.

On July 17, 1905, parliament passed a bill entitled "An Act respecting annuities for certain Privy Councillors." The bill provided that every cabinet minister or prime minister who retired at the end of at least five years of consecutive service should upon retirement be paid a life annuity of one-half his salary, less any other salary or pension he might receive from the Crown after his retirement.

The measure was introduced rather late in the session, and I gather from reading the

reports that there was no extended discussion of it. Honourable Mr. Fielding, Minister of Finance, introduced the measure, and Sir Robert Borden, then Mr. R. L. Borden, leader of the opposition, also supported it in principle. Apparently between the date of introduction and the following session there was considerable criticism of this measure throughout the country, so much so that when parliament met in the following year Mr. Fielding proposed that the legislation be repealed. This was accordingly done.

During the debate on the motion to repeal the legislation many different views were expressed, but my impression from a careful reading of the report is that, except for one or two members who were opposed to pensions of all kinds and maintained that the right course was to pay higher salaries and let ministers look after themselves, the principle of the measure received unanimous support. Both in and out of parliament there were many suggestions that the legislation had not been carefully considered. There was a proposal that the British practice be followed, but this was brushed aside as being unsatisfactory. Finally, in the session of 1906, the government decided to repeal the bill. Sir Wilfrid Laurier spoke at great length. He took the position that in principle the pension scheme was right, but agreed that the difficulties should be given further study. In concluding the debate Mr. Fielding said:

The ground on which I favour the repeal of this Act is that it is evidently in advance of the public opinion of the country, and to that public opinion we are all obliged to bow . . . This matter will come up again when some of us are no longer here, and I want to say that this Act will not be repealed with my consent on the principle that pensions are wrong, but simply because it is in advance of the public opinion of the day, and I think we should bow to that public opinion until, by the process of education, the country is prepared to do that which in principle I believe it would be right to do.

Honourable senators, I have only mentioned this because, no matter how desirable it may be, this subject is always a difficult one to put forward for consideration. Honourable senators know that legislation affecting revenues is preceded by resolution emanating from those who would be directly interested. Even though they saw fit, members of the House of Commons would not be in a position to advance such a scheme, because they might be open to a charge that they were ambitious to benefit from it.

Bearing in mind the economy of the country and the trend both in and out of the government service, it seems to me that some group or body could render a useful public