

Statute Law Amendment Act, 1970

The hon. member talks about doing something for ourselves, doing something which is so terrible. He talks about those who are in a position to control things in their own interests taking unfair and undue advantage. I am going to ask, through you, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member in his conscience thinks the step to correct the kind of situation I have described is so unconscionable, so terrible, that he has to delete every reference to it from the measure before us. I find again a curious dichotomy in the thinking of the hon. member. When he talks about other pensions he is absolutely straightforward and asks for equity, asks for improvements in benefits. He made a slight slip the other day in committee when the government provision was going to deny a widow the benefit if she remarried; then he reverted to his usual way of looking at pensions and said this was not generous. But this slip did not last very long because when it comes to benefits for Members of Parliament he has a totally different standard than that which he applies to any other pension plan.

On March 31, 1969, for example I note that the excess of receipts over disbursements for this curious plan which the members of Parliament set up for themselves was \$2,621,185.88. A plan that gets 88 per cent of the people to put their money into it, leave it there interest free and just get a return of contributions at the end of the period, cannot lose. That kind of plan, if it existed in private industry and a union were to make representations in regard to it, would be subject to the most vicious attacks. But I have never heard the hon. member talking about low rates of pay, these low rates of pensions the scandalous rates for the widows or the excess accumulation in this fund, although he has asked numerous questions about the operation of every other fund that exists. If I am wrong, I invite the hon. member to correct me on this score.

What disturbs me even more is that whenever a comparison is made, and the hon. member was most explicit here, his comparison is with the old age pension, with the war veterans allowance recipients; it is never with an executive in industry. He expressly repudiates that concept. Yet he expects people to come here and give of their best. I know some hon. members on the other side of the House whose wives are working, not altogether from choice. I know one hon. member who sits on the other side—it does not detract from my respect and admiration

[Mr. Francis.]

for him, and although he is not here today, I hope I am not embarrassing him—who, in the course of providing university education for three children, has gone into debt to the bank substantially in excess of five figures. This is the situation that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) seems to put completely aside in his mind.

It is possible to come to this House and live frugally in the city. I have the greatest respect for the people who do this. You can have a room or two and eat your meals in the fifth floor cafeteria or even bring a sandwich or two. If you have the kind of constituency that returns you year after year, you conduct a heavy volume of correspondence and are active in participation, it is likely that constituents will continue to give their loyalty. But there are constituencies that have switched loyalties. I am thinking of my opponent who won the seat in Carleton with a 19,000, majority in 1958, and five years later lost the very same seat. Previously, every one of his opponents had lost his deposit, but within five years he lost his seat. This is the way some constituencies can change because people repudiate the policy of the government or of the candidate. Some constituencies with their record of repudiation of candidates, which is their democratic right and their privilege, can place a pension plan in very difficult circumstances.

In spite of what the hon. member may think—he is smiling now—a pension plan is an obligation not only to the people who run for the safe seats but to those who run for the seats that are not so safe, that is not only for the seats that have 35 years of loyalty to a member but for those that can switch loyalties. There may be a personal defect of the MP, but the point I am making is whether it is so scandalous, so wrong, so terrible to revise the rules for a plan that allows only 12 per cent to benefit and to benefit by the small amounts, I have indicated.

I respect people who come into public life and treat it as a form of service. But with the greatest respect, there are many people here who might have chosen the monastic life or some other life. They do not have the kind of family responsibilities that other members have and that is fine. Parliament is their whole life and their contribution is great, but those members have an obligation to be charitable, too. They have an obligation to recognize that Parliament consists of average Canadians as well as the type who might choose a vow of poverty. Parliament must