

As will be recalled, the House last session increased pensions to the disabled, to widows and dependent parents resident in Canada, by a bonus of 50 per cent over the basic rates which were reached in 1917, and further increases, not by way of a bonus, were at the same time granted in respect of wives and children. This increase came into effect as and from September last, since when the totally disabled unmarried man, whose rank is below that of captain, has been in receipt of \$75 a month or \$900 a year, and such a man if married and with three children of pensionable age (thus making up an average family of five), has been paid \$137 a month, or \$1,644 a year. If in addition to his disability he is in a helpless condition, a further allowance up to \$750 a year can be granted him to meet the cost of attendance, nursing, etc.

It has been pointed out on former occasions that the above figures represent a striking increase from the pensions awarded in the earlier years of the war. For instance, in 1914 the pension for total disability was the utterly ridiculous sum of \$150 per annum. That rose early in 1915 to \$264; was again increased the following year to \$480, and reached in the autumn of 1917 what is now denominated the basic rate of \$600 per annum. In 1919 a 20 per cent bonus on that basic rate was granted, which bonus was, as just said, increased to 50 per cent last year. I do not delay to compare in like fashion the increases in pensions to the disabled man who is married, but without family, or to widows, widowed mothers or other dependents. While the latter have not been put upon the same basis as a totally disabled man, their pensions have, nevertheless, been frequently and sensibly increased. The basic rate for the widow fixed in 1917 was \$40 a month, or \$480 a year. By the addition of a bonus of 50 per cent she has since September been paid \$60 a month, and if she has children of pensionable age she receives as well, \$180 per annum for the first child, \$144 for the second child, and \$120 for the third and each subsequent child.

The object to be attained in awarding pensions is not to compensate the recipient for the loss which he or she may have suffered. To attempt this on even a moderate scale would bankrupt the wealthiest nation. What is aimed at is to give an amount sufficient to maintain the pensioner in decent comfort.

It goes without saying, that as commodity prices rise, or the value of the dollar

[Mr. Cronyn.]

shrinks, it is imperative that pensions must at least keep pace with the rise, or otherwise the standard of decent comfort must be abandoned. A like reasoning leads to the conclusion that when prices fall and the dollar returns to its old purchasing power, pensions may be lowered without departure from the standard fixed. It is exceedingly difficult in a country so widespread as Canada, with its varying conditions of livelihood, to generalize on what is or what is not a sufficient income for any man or woman. The best one can hope to do is to compare pensions with incomes earned in various walks of life, and to secure the opinion of those who are brought into intimate touch with the pensioner and his dependents.

Without attempting to make an exhaustive analysis of the situation, I think it may be fairly said that outside of a few exceptional expensive localities, pensions to the totally disabled, widows and widowed mothers do very fairly fulfil to-day their proper functions and object.

The question then arises, has the time come when some modification can justly be made? It is apparent to all that for some months the cost of living has had a downward tendency. This is confirmed by the figures collected under the Department of Labour, which show the average prices in 60 cities of Canada, of those necessities required to maintain a family of five. The chart prepared by that department for the use of the committee gives in graphic form the trend of the prices in this family budget from 1913 down to March of this year. So far as my knowledge goes, this is the first chart to show, not only rentals, fuel and food, but as well the items of clothing and sundries. From it at a glance, it can be seen that during the months of June and July of 1920 the budget had reached its highest point since the war, when it was just twice what it had been in 1913. Since then there has been some decline, notably in foods and clothing, a decline which, however, has been offset to some extent by a stiffening in rentals, and high prices for fuel. In March of this year the budget stood at the same level as that prevailing during the latter months of 1919, but it has still a long way to fall before it reaches the level of 1917, when were fixed the basic rates for pensions.

The committee had no hesitation in deciding that the bonus of 50 per cent should be maintained for another twelve months, that is, until September 1, 1922. It is to be feared that few pensioners have been in a