

SOLDIERS' PENSIONS A comparative statement of soldiers' pensions has again been issued by the publicity department at Ottawa. The pensions paid in Canada we are told are much higher than any other country; almost twice as much as in Great Britain. Canada pays ~~the~~ totally disabled fifty dollars per month, Britain only pays twenty-nine dollars.

A statement of pensions paid without a comparative statement of the cost of living is always misleading. It may be that the British soldier with his small pension would be better off than the Canadian soldier with his big pension. There are other factors when discussing pensions which ought to be considered before passing judgment on the advertised generosity of Ottawa.

The first is the medical classification of the soldier who is discharged with a pension. All soldiers are medically examined and classified according to their disability and inability to earn a living in the open market before their discharge. The medical boards are made up of men who are not usually conversant with industrial conditions, and very often men of poor judgment, hence there is often a great disparity in the classification. We have in mind a striking example of this statement which is common gossip.

Colonel L——, now a member of the Pensions Commission, was invalided home from France suffering from a lesion of the heart. He is classified as totally disabled and draws the maximum pension of eighteen hundred and ninety dollars per year, besides his salary on the commission. A private from Edmonton, suffering from the same complaint, was ~~invalided~~ classified as disabled and is now

the inequality of pensions or dependents of officers and men, were removed, our pension system would be more worthy to boast about.

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NEWSPAPER CRITICISM It is common for people to criticise newspapers; the news is said to be colored, and the general editorial tone is such as to uphold the mighty and discredit the people.

The Morning Albertan which is perhaps the most fearless newspaper in the Province of Alberta and which has often with loss to itself defended the issues in favor of the people, frankly states in a recent editorial why such criticism as mentioned above has a foundation. The Morning Albertan in the editorial referred to did not speak of this particular point but in answer to a correspondent regarding the failure of the newspapers to increase their prices to the subscribers in keeping with the increased cost of production, it said that newspapers were relying more on advertisers than on subscribers for support, and consequently were able to get along without charging more for subscriptions. If there is any truth in the trite newspaper criticism this will be found to be the reason—it is the advertisers not the general reading public that the paper looks to for support. The Albertan says, "This is a bad system."

Now, are the subscribers willing to pay enough for newspapers to make these papers independent of the advertisers. We doubt this very much. But until they are willing to do so they might as well withhold criticism.

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SIGNS THAT The Calgary Local

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ONE DOLLAR PER YEAR.

"There is no wealth but life. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings." — Ruskin.

~~THE~~ **THE NEXT-OF-KIN** The Calgary Next-of-Kin Association is passing through a stormy period at the present time, caused by a few of the highbrow (?) ladies who have been so accustomed to run things that they can never feel at home in the Next-of-Kin unless they are bossing.

This association was started by a few women of vision who anticipated the problems of war, and saw the necessity of banding together for self protection.

In the first stages of the movement none of the upper ten class of women could be found to recognize it, but as soon as the organization became strong and influential then immediately an attempt was made to capture it; whether political purposes or merely personal ends account for this, we cannot say.

It seems reasonably certain that much of the disturbance has been caused by the supercilious interference of some of the officers' wives. These ladies have little or nothing in common with the wives of privates, and not until equal pay to officers and privates be given will their wives meet on an equal footing.

As things are at present, we would recommend that the wives of officers form an organization of their own, and run it any way they please. The Next-of-Kin is a working-class organization with the proletariat outlook, and will not be officered well by officers' wives.

now he will vote.

Why does Mr. Galbraith not earn the right to sit on the cross benches by joining the Non-Partisan League? If he will do this his expenses will be paid directly from the pockets of his own people, and he will be their servant in reality.

We believe that Mr. Galbraith is playing the old political game and is the first sign of an attempt to Unionise the Province of Alberta. We have had enough of this already, in Dominion politics, and it is not likely that Mr. Galbraith can be elected without the aid of a Union Government election act, campaign funds notwithstanding.

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U.F.A. CAMPAIGN The United Farmers of Alberta are about to launch a great campaign for membership and education along co-operative lines. This is much needed, and we believe the time is opportune.

The farmers' industrial movement is spreading throughout our whole Dominion and will bring with it enlightenment and the spirit of co-operation. It is this spirit that is needed more than anything else in the trying times that are ahead of every nation in the world. This is the king spirit of the new age.

Recently we have got the United Farmers of Ontario, and now the movement has entered New Brunswick: when will we get the United Farmers of Quebec? All the organized provinces should interest themselves more in the organizations of other provinces. We believe that the uniting of the farmers of Quebec would be a very desirable accomplishment, for with their co-operation greater things may be done for the common good.

President Wood of the Alberta organization has accepted an invitation to go on a lecture tour with the Chautauqua this summer. We con-

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Colonel L——, now a member of the Pensions Commission, was invalided home from France suffering from a lesion of the heart. He is classified as totally disabled and draws the maximum pension of eighteen hundred and ninety dollars per year, besides his salary on the commission. A private from Edmonton, suffering from the same complaint, was invalided home classified as partially disabled, and is now drawing the magnificent pension of about one hundred dollars per year. Is this fair? The maximum pension in Canada may be the highest but what is the use of a high maximum if the medical boards classify in this way?

There is another objection to the pension system that ought to be rectified. Returned soldiers suffering from a chronic disease may receive their discharge immediately on returning to Canada regardless of whether the disease was contracted on active service or not. The discharged soldier is then handed over to the care of the Invalid Soldiers' Commission as a civilian. Should he die while under the care of this commission, being no longer a soldier, he is not entitled to a pension. If these and other objections, such as

mentioned above has a foundation. The Morning Albertan in the editorial referred to did not speak of this particular point but in answer to a correspondent regarding the failure of the newspapers to increase their prices to the subscribers in keeping with the increased cost of production, it said that newspapers were relying more on advertisers than on subscribers for support, and consequently were able to get along without charging more for subscriptions. If there is any truth in the trite newspaper criticism this will be found to be the reason—it is the advertisers not the general reading public that the paper looks to for support. The Albertan says, "This is a bad system."

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SIGNS THAT WOMEN WILL REFORM THE WORLD

The Calgary Local Council of Women—to those who know it best, is most famous for its utter ignorance of the real human problems. Its attitude is Tory and Imperialistic, and for jingoism it would resemble a pink tea in Potsdam. But while this is generally true of the Council, there are a few able and progressive women amongst those composing the Council, who may succeed ultimately in redeeming the institution.

There are signs already of a slight improvement in the direction of humanness in this most useless society. For instance, it has recently forwarded a resolution to the Prime Minister of Canada and to Mr. T. M. Tweedie, M.P., asking that the shooting of wild birds for sport

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JEAN McWILLIAM

By
GEORGEEN BARRASS

Prime Minister R. B. Bennett once told Jean McWilliam, "If you had had the education, Jean, you would have been the cleverest woman in Canada." This was a fitting tribute to an amazing woman who devoted her life to a fight for better treatment of neglected and underprivileged people. Her papers and memoirs, recently donated to Glenbow Archives by her daughter, Mrs. Mollie la France, tell the story of this remarkable woman and her achievements.

Born in Ireland in 1877, Jean McDonald was a descendant of the proud Blaney family, and in her infancy her people emigrated to the west coast of Scotland. Of thirteen children, only three survived; her mother, worn out by child-bearing and deprivation, died at the age of thirty-nine. In that era, neither the large family nor the many deaths was uncommon, nor was the fact that children like Jean, at the age of eleven, had to leave home and school and seek employment. Her father, a pig-iron lifter, had tried his best to keep the family together after his wife's death but his day began at 3 a.m. when he broke the first cast of iron, and he worked long hours.

Jean was employed variously as household help, parlour maid and dairymaid. When she married, she and her husband worked on a dairy farm and after her first child was born, the little one had to be tied in bed until her mother had completed her work and could return to care for her. Four more children arrived and of these, two died from diphtheria and one, a little two-year old girl, from a disease contracted in hospital where she had been taken to have her foot straightened.

In 1907, Jean and her husband decided to make a new start in Canada. After a brief experience in the East, the McWilliams came to Alberta to work on a dairy farm near Lacombe. The journey was broken at Calgary where a room was obtained for the night in the Palace Hotel. Electric

light was a novelty to them, and neither Jean nor her husband knew how to turn it off — perhaps a blessing, as when it was time for them to join their children in what they had thought were clean beds, they found them infested with bed bugs.

Determined that her children should have the education which she herself lacked, Jean McWilliam came to Calgary and rented a house near City Hall where she kept boarders. Police Chief Mackie was searching for a matron to look after female prisoners, and, in filling this night time position, Jean encountered women in all kinds of trouble. Indeed, when she later lived in Victoria Park, her new neighbours were convinced that she herself was a bad character, as the "Black Maria" called for her often during the night.

With this background, it is not surprising that Jean McWilliam fought for family limitation, child welfare, unemployment and increased old age pensions, better treatment for patients in mental hospitals, and improved conditions for store employees.

During the first World War, wives of soldiers received inadequate allowance, and Jean McWilliam, with other soldiers' wives, organized the "Next-of-Kin" association. One of their speakers was R. B. Bennett, who, at the outbreak of war, had assured soldiers and their wives that they would be well cared for; he had also volunteered free assistance in the solving of problems which might arise. In the course of his speech he remarked that he had seen



Mrs. Jean McWilliam is seen here with her first Calgary boarders in 1911. Left to right, standing: Alf Wall, Mrs. McWilliam, Jock Torrance, hired girl Eileen Eccles, and Mr. McDonald; front, Fred Wall and Mollie McWilliam.

tears of sympathy running down the cheeks of Sir Robert Borden when he read the lists of casualties in France. During the question period, Mrs. McWilliam asked if there had been tears of sympathy on Borden's cheeks when he read the amount of the soldier's wife's allowance.

The result was turmoil and on the following day, Jean received a severe letter from R. B. Bennett requesting her to come to his office for an interview. His first words were "Do you realize what you have done? Your inflammatory words at that meeting are grounds for being charged with slander, and I want you to know that I will not tolerate this." Jean's Irish blood was up and looking him squarely in the eye she answered, "Mr. Bennett, to the rest of the women in Calgary you may be God Almighty, but to me you are just plain R. B. Bennett and you do not frighten me one bit". Fortunately, R. B. was a man who liked a challenge and ad-

mired anyone who would stand up to him. To the end of his days, it was her champion, and her papers include a sincere and appreciative letter which he wrote on his retirement from active political life.

In the mid 1920's Jean was active in the Women's Labour League; it was as a delegate of this body that she joined the Local Council of Women. One of her pet reforms was the Old Age Pension Act, the first resolution for which came through the Women's Labour League in 1922.

The National Social Security Council, which she helped form in Calgary in the mid-1930's, also had pensions as its aim; its goal was to demolish the means test, which had deterred many an elderly person from applying for the Old Age pension, and to lower the retirement age for men to sixty years and for women to fifty-five years with a guaranteed pension of sixty dollars per month.

In 1945 the National Social Security Association was formed, with Jean McDonald (she had been divorced and remarried in 1936) as President. This body had the same aims as the National Social Security Council, and Jean travelled throughout southern Alberta speaking in various towns. In the latter 1940's Mrs. McDonald and Mrs. Dorothy Anderson travelled to Ottawa at their own expense to interview the Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, whom they found interested in their organization.

Jean McDonald lived to see the fruits of her labours — child welfare, mothers' allowance, health plans, better old age pensions and care for the elderly.

She died in Calgary in 1969 — a woman who not only carried her convictions to the public and those in authority but one who practised them in her daily life, for her home and her heart were always open to the needy and underprivileged.

Jean became the voice of Calgary's conscience

Life for young Jean had not been easy. Born in Ireland and raised in Scotland she was a family servant at the age of 11, a parlor-maid at 13 and a certificate-holding butter and cheese maker at 17.

She arrived in Canada in 1907

with two surviving children of her original brood of five and spent the first Canadian years of her married life helping to support an elusive husband who homesteaded, fought with the infantry in the First World War and never did appear to fit into the Canadian scene.



JEAN McWILLIAM SOON BECAME THE TALK OF CALGARY

Glenbow Museum photo

Jean McWilliam recalled her first encounter with Calgary in 1909, a typical unsavory episode at the Palace Hotel, opposite the railway station.

"We thought the room looked all right . . . so I undressed the children and put them to bed. Then as I had never known anything about electric lights I did not know how to turn out the light. But my husband and I took a walk down 9th Avenue and when we returned and were getting ready for bed I moved the little girl over in the bed. She was surrounded with bedbugs. About 3 a.m. we decided to wake the children and get out of the filthy place and wander around until 8 o'clock when the train would leave for the north."

The couple and their two youngsters experienced a succession of setbacks including backbreaking work for pittance pay, illness and intolerance before a family split, that saw the husband head off to try proving up some raw land at Munson and the wife struggling to create and maintain a family income in Calgary.

Day started at 6

Jean McWilliam started each weekday morning at 6 while her two children were still asleep. Fortunately her office cleaning job at the Carlyle Dairy was just a couple of blocks from the little brick cottage she rented across 7th Avenue from the Pro-Cathedral of the Redeemer. At 7:30, opening time for the offices, Jean scurried home to rouse and feed the children and complete her own household chores in order to be on duty as a housemaid six days a week in a Calgary suburb.

"The first house I rented was a small one and apparently the people who had lived there had killed chickens in the upstairs part. At this same time a young girl had been murdered in the red light district and, as there was a red light at the end of the street, I was sure I was living in the red light district and that the house I had taken was the one in which the girl had been killed.

This thought was so strong in my mind that one night as I was sewing I must have dozed off to sleep, or else I really saw the stair door open and a beautiful girl in a light blue silk dress with lace trimmings stood in the doorway. My little boy was asleep. I looked at the girl. She was about 20 years old and she smiled at me and vanished. The moon was shining very bright and I did not have proper window shades. Now I was very sure I was living in the red light

murder. I made enquiries the next day, but was informed the red light on the corner was the fire alarm box. But I did not sleep much that night and got busy and got another house."

Jean kept working until she had acquired enough beds and dishes to open a boarding house. There was a building in Calgary so boys, at \$6 a week, were easy to find. Soon her house was filled, she rented the house next door, hired a girl to help and ultimately had 18 to 20 boarders.

Police matron

"The chief of police was Thomas Mackie and, as I lived so handy to the city hall he asked me if I would act as matron for the police when they arrested girls . . . I consented and it brought me in a few dollars more a month. It was mostly 2 or 3 in the morning when these girls were brought in so I was always home in time to get the boys their breakfast."

In due course Jean McWilliam bought her own place for \$5,500, with a down payment of \$200 — all she had to her name. It was a gamble but she said, "It may take me a 100 years to pay for it but I'll buy it. Now I'll be a real taxpayer and a real Canadian."

That was in 1911, when the police department bought the first paddy-wagon. Jean recounted: "Often during the night the Black Maria would come for me to go and act as matron. My few neighbors thought I was a pretty bad character getting arrested so often. However I got acquainted with them as time went on and we used to laugh over their worries when I explained my position."

When the First World War placed a dark financial burden upon veterans' wives, Jean helped form a "next-of-kin" organization, for a federal election was in the offing and Calgary's R.B. Bennett had assured soldiers and their wives of his personal political attention to their problems. "R.B." addressed the ladies at one of their group meetings and found the going pretty hot, spearheaded by acerbic-tongued Jean. Shortly after he sent for her to explain her needling stance, she reported their encounter.

"Mr. Bennett had a characteristic way of looking at a person very sternly over the top of his glasses. As I entered the room he gave me this treatment and, of course, expected me to be completely cowed. He said, 'Do you realize what you have done? That your inflammatory words at the meeting are grounds for your being charged with slan-

der. I will not tolerate this.'

"I looked him square in the eye and answered, 'Mr. Bennett, to the rest of the women of Calgary you may be God Almighty, but to me you are just plain R.B. Bennett and you do not frighten me one bit.'

"He was astounded and absolutely floored. It ended that we became very close and dear friends and he was my champion to the very end of his days."

The Russian Revolution that followed the First World War hostilities spurred Jean to become an ardent Socialist and, because of her outspoken manner, identified by many as a radical. During the suffering and sorrow of the post-war influenza epidemic, Jean opened her house to the Red Cross and additionally volunteered to visit homes of flu victims to house-clean, nurse and feed the helpless.

The next of Jean's tests was the return of her wounded husband from the battlefields of France. He was deeply discouraged by the neglect of his Munson property during his absence and decided to return to Britain alone. Meanwhile Jean had met the man who was to change her name to Jean McDonald and who was to see her fling herself into one post-war fray after another in her dedication to fight for the underdog.

Fought for pensions

"In those days old-age pensions were very meagre," she declared, "and those of us who were concerned with the plight of the poor were very anxious to improve conditions. A small group of us called 'The Women's Labor League' kept prodding the government to raise pensions and assist the poor."

Jean McDonald and some colleagues went to bat to nudge the provincial UFA government to license chiropractors; they learned of the highly unsatisfactory patient conditions at the Ponoka Mental Hospital and "got busy with pen and voice to have those unfortunate people helped." Jean became involved in a murder trial in the town of Carbon. She and her vocal cohorts believed the accused to be the victim of an unfair trial so they badgered until the fellow was granted a retrial that resulted in his acquittal.

Jean McDonald became a zealous supporter of the efforts of Margaret Sanger, champion of birth control. It was a highly controversial stand but Jean as usual was loudly vocal and dedicated in her belief that family limitation was essential to a woman's rights.

In the 1920s she became involved in the plight of local Indians and shared her outspoken views

LOOKING BACK



JACK PEACH

with others through the pages of newspapers. Very close to Jean's generous heart was the plight of young women brought to Calgary from factory jobs in Britain to work at starvation wages as domestics. Knowing that subject so well she had heated words with several prominent Calgary women including Nellie McClung who is believed to have written Jean, in a rather unflattering way, into one of her novels. The two met in later years and smoothed their ruffled feathers because each admired the other's progressive ideas and courage.

It was R.B. Bennett who maintained a belief that, had Jean received a formal education, she would have been one of the truly clever women leaders of Canada. Mollie LaFrance, Jean's daughter and a lifetime Calgary resident, reported that Alex Ross a member of the UFA provincial government once dissuaded her indomitable mother from joining the civil service, something she was sorely tempted to do. "No Jean, he said, 'To be a civil servant one has to be narrow, petty and servile and I can't say you have these qualifications.'"

Spoke for the timid

A Calgary alderman was heard to say of Jean during one of her many crusades, "For God's sake give her what she wants and get her off our necks!" It must have been one of those times when she was speaking for those who were too timid to speak for themselves; those who benefited so much from Jean McDonald's continuing work to form and foster the growth of the National Social Security Association, aimed at securing a lower old-age pension age, elimination of the means test and improvement in old people's homes.

Her six decades in Calgary were productively busy, and as the self-appointed voice of Calgary's social conscience, she spent 60 golden years of great and useful determination and purpose in our midst.