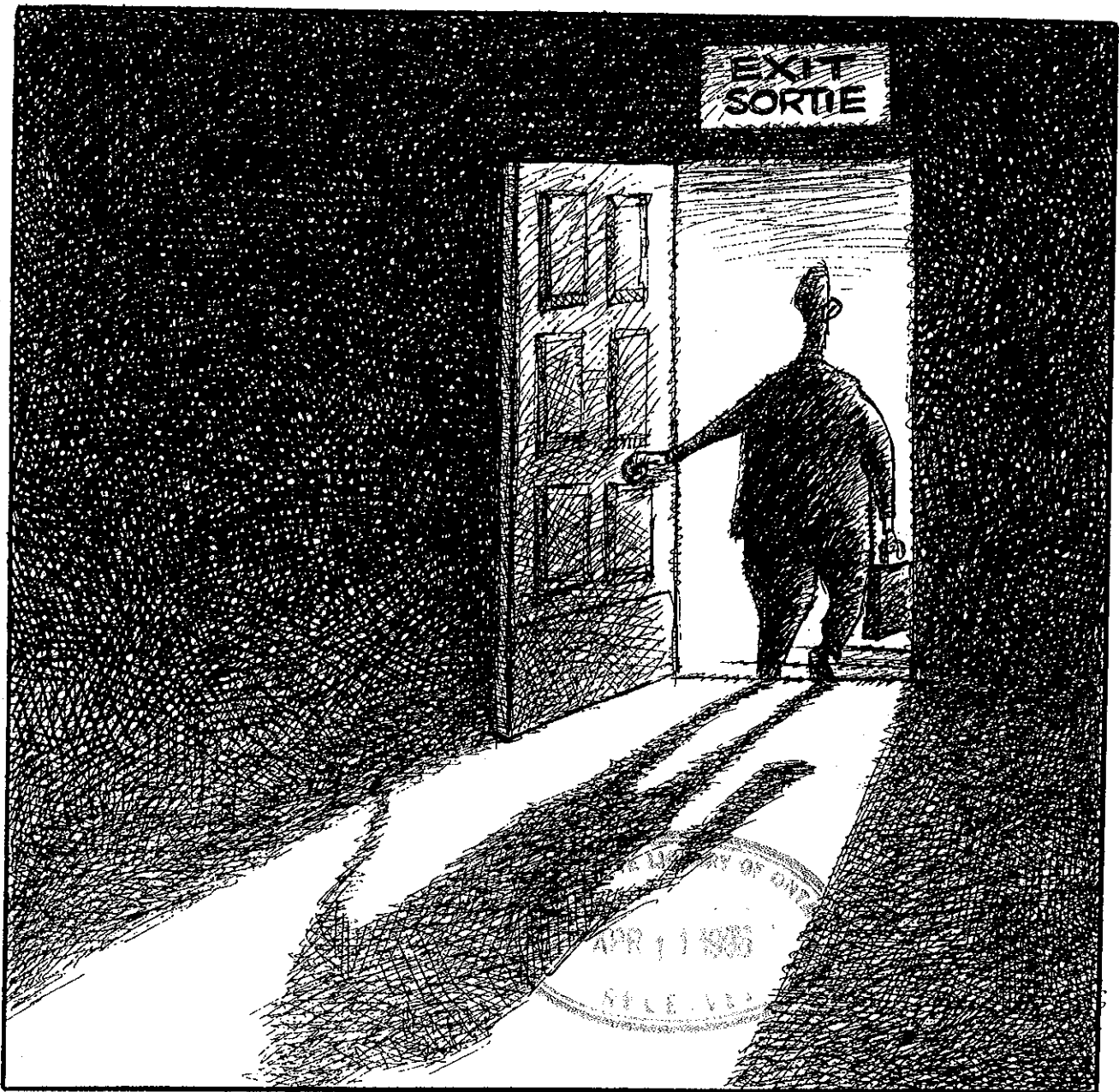


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## There is Life after Parliament Hill but ... let the Candidate be Cautious

by Jeffrey Holmes

*Responses from a questionnaire sent to former MPs indicate that the experience of leaving public office, through defeat or retirement, can be very varied. Few are able to pick up their former life where it left off.*

Post-parliamentary experience is as varied as the composition of the House of Commons. However, even for some of the former Members for whom that experience has been positive, it seems to have fallen below expectations; and the transition period has been far more difficult than most had foreseen. While many adapt successfully to retirement or return to "the real world",

the majority of those who commented have found their service as former Members more a hindrance than a help in finding a job and in resuming a "normal" life. The handful of high-profile success stories in the media does not reflect the job experience of most former M.P.s, including ministers.

These conclusions are based on a survey of the 200 Members of the

34th Parliament who did not return to the 35th — 70 who chose not to run and 130 who were defeated. The questionnaire was answered by 71 former M.P.s (23 retired and 48 defeated). The response also represented a cross-section in terms of party affiliation, age and gender. Nor was it evident that the responses came mainly from those who had found the transition difficult. Moreo-

ver, it is possible that some of those who were defeated did not respond because they found it painful even to discuss their experience.

Age seemed a relatively minor factor in making adjustments. The average age of those who retired was 58.6; for those who ran and were defeated it was 53.0. A majority in each group were in their fifties when the 1993 election was held — and therefore vulnerable. “I am 58 and in good health, yet I am often told I am too old.”

Reaction to the parliamentary experience, after anywhere from five to twenty three years in Parliament, was varied, and sometimes ambivalent:

It was the greatest experience of my life. Would I seek re-election? I doubt it.

Perhaps the only clear distinction in responses was between those who retired voluntarily and those who were defeated — emotionally as well as in terms of finding new activity. Reaction to the transition, and retrospective views on parliamentary service, were largely positive on the part of the retirees, even though many of them welcomed the end of an often exhausting experience. Among those who were defeated, while a majority of one felt positively about the transition, the intensity of the positive and negative responses indicated major variations in attitude and in post-parliamentary experience.

In general, those who have made a successful transition said

less than those who have had trouble. As a result, the emphasis that emerges is on problems rather than on the opportunities. Those who had had a difficult transition tended to take advantage of the open-ended questionnaire to articulate problems: those who had landed well tended to taciturnity — and to the assumption that they were exceptions to the rule. The fact that all defeated respondents had been PC or NDP Members probably had an effect.

### Post-parliament planning

Not surprisingly, the most successful transition was by those who had planned retirement as the election approached; the fact that there was no need to come to terms with the bitterness of defeat was a bonus. Some of those who were defeated stress the need for planning, and recognition of future financial needs — perhaps before entering the political race.

My advice to those who are neither on leave from a tenured position nor wealthy would be to not seek office until of sufficient means to live independently upon leaving office.

Clearly, it was useful to plan, whether or not one wished to find work. One former minister, who did not contest the election, had quietly discussed opportunities before the election and incorporated his business three months later. He wanted “the challenge of building something different”. Others had prepared at longer range.

In the last decade or two, I had been planning the re-

### Retiring...but not retiring

“I have put considerable thought and emotion into this decision [not to seek re-election].

I believe my talents and experience over 30 years of national and international life can, at this stage, best be used outside elective politics. I plan to continue to serve the causes that I have championed: human rights, sustainable development, disarmament, and a strengthened United Nations.

I leave Parliament confident that I have served my community and encouraged national awareness of the importance of the voluntary and non-governmental sectors.

My work with our two world-class universities, chambers of commerce, industries and prototype environmental endeavours has been a source of pride and satisfaction. I have worked with ethnocultural communities, citizenship programs, schools and churches to make ours a more tolerant and open society.

For the opportunity to have served, I owe gratitude to those who have shared my vision. I acknowledge the support of the many volunteers and my small dedicated staff in both my constituency and Ottawa offices, who have helped me address local needs in an accessible, people-oriented manner. My wife and sons have shared in and contributed to all these experiences; I thank them for their love and support.”

mainder of my life which had been extremely active and most gratifying. My family and closest personal friends were helpful in their advice. My decision not to run again was the correct one.

We had planned for retirement and registered with a co-op housing group two or three years earlier. We wanted to continue living downtown.

Members who did not run or who had foreseen the possibility of defeat, adapted more easily to the changes in their lives and many saw their service as a useful and satisfying learning experience. One, for instance, is taking "the chance to address issues I care about and to fulfil my desire to write". Others welcomed a return to normalcy.

Yes, you can survive — and above all learn to live normally. Parliamentary life is not real life. In my case, readaptation at every level was extremely easy.

The most rewarding aspect of post-parliamentary life is the option of regaining one's privacy.

The transition was smooth and wonderful. My wife and I were totally prepared. Neither of us misses the former life. The experience as an MP was interesting, educational, fascinating, at times exhilarating, but tiring. I have suffered no withdrawal symptoms.

## *"Parliamentary life is not real life."*

It is a great relief to be living in one city and with my young daughter and to have a job with regular hours and vacation time.

### **Hardest on the youngest?**

Those who had served only the most recent five-year term seemed the hardest hit, emotionally and financially. For some, who had entered at a relatively young age, there was a problem in finding a new self-image, and career, after coming out of Parliament with little saleable experience. Even those who had begun a professional career before turning to federal politics found themselves in strong competition with younger professionals.

A few were not deterred. One defeated candidate said he'd like to run again. "It was a good experience and fit my local and provincial labour interests." Another "missed the process, the politics, the decision-making and all the associated challenges" and returned to municipal politics. A third explained on the telephone that he had been too busy to complete the questionnaire because: "There's a nomination meeting on Saturday and I'm going in for politics again."

### **Helpful for some**

A minority of those who sought employment saw their time in Parliament as helpful or "very helpful", mostly because of contacts made

## **No understanding. No appreciation.**

"Life after Parliament Hill is no bed of roses. The public have no comprehension of the kind of time involved and the work and effort put into being an M.P. or even being a minister. They do not understand the damage you have done your prospects in your other life by taking four or eight or twenty-five years out to participate in public life. Nor do they have any appreciation of the experience or what you might have learned or what talents might have been enhanced.

The attitude of most Canadian businesses or business men and women is shortsighted. They do not appear interested in giving former M.P.s or ministers opportunities to get back to the private sector in a meaningful way. They appear to cultivate and use people while they are in a position to affect their prospects but to ignore them once they are out. The healthy relationship in the United States, with people going in and out of politics and business, is not evident here.

M.P.s should start defending themselves and their value to society lustily, or the present ill-regard for politicians will never be reversed. M.P.s should show backbone and explain the reasons for benefits while pushing to remove a few, such as the right to a pension after only six years of service."

## *"Who, but who, would want to go into politics now?"*

through the various issues dealt with and a widening of fields of interest. One cited finance committee work as introducing him to a network of business leaders; another noted that he had been given credit for government investment in his riding. A third said "knowledge of the workings of Parliament and contacts developed have assisted me in setting up a consulting business". And one high-profile retiree "left better known than when I arrived".

One respondent found the combination of public and private service a recipe for success.

Because of the network of business people I developed as an M.P. for nine years and trust company executive for

thirty five, I set up my own consulting company. After a difficult few months, I am now making three to four times the salary of an M.P.

A few simply enjoyed their years in Parliament. For one it was "a welcome change after years in the provincial legislature". One of the youngest regarded Parliament as "a family school" and "graduated joyfully from the Hill". He celebrated his defeat and return to the private sector at an anniversary dinner with his wife and daughter. "Today, life is super."

### **Adjustment may take months**

Whatever the attitude, adjustment takes time. At the basic administrative level, it takes at least

two months, according to one respondent, "to close up, keep what you want, look after your staff, and adjust". The ex-Member and spouse must adjust from a hectic schedule to zero; friends need time "to treat you again as an ordinary mortal" and prospective employers need time to assess former Members on their merits. "After 13 months," one concluded, "few treat me as a non-political person interested in a 'normal' life." Another was hopeful that "after a year, things are looking up, emotionally and financially".

Sometimes a break helps.

It was a mistake to seek work immediately after "the defeat". I needed three months rest.

My wife and I were able to travel for three months after the election. We were tired after the campaign and when you are job-hunting you are not in a good position to present yourself. You're still dealing with the emotional drain of defeat if you can't get away, do something different for a while. Politics is intense and you need time for decompression.

I returned to my chosen profession on an interim basis. I am now the executive director of a national institute.

For others, the break has been involuntary. A number of respondents are still seeking paid work or have given up: "I looked around for a bit but there was nothing. I'm almost at retirement age so I quit looking." Many, however, saw the

### **Turn the page...quickly!**

"For the best chance of success in a new [post-parliamentary] career, it is important to turn the page...as quickly as possible.

On the evening of my defeat, 25 October, 1993, I mentioned that I was quitting political life, turning the page and returning to the practice of law. Next morning, I received two calls from law firms. Two weeks later, I began work as an associate in a law firm.

It took me many months to bring some order to my affairs, sell my Ottawa residence, and deal with a pile of material problems, while having to take courses on the new Quebec Civil Code. I could never have succeeded if I had not, in my head, already turned the page.

It is important to give yourself new challenges, to face life with courage, and good humour and to avoid complaining about your defeat or blaming the electors...or the world. To declare that you accept the verdict of the electors, without pretending to be happy about it, shows a capacity to get quickly back on track.

I have definitely left politics; my children have adapted to new surroundings and are happy; my wife is happy; so am I."

lack of public understanding, or appreciation of, the M.P.'s role as a major problem for anyone contemplating national political life: "Who, but who, would want to go into politics now?" Even those with no regrets found leaving Parliament "a very difficult transition — practically, though not emotionally". None echoed their colleague who "simply resumed my life where I left off".

It was much harder to get work and re-establish than expected. There are few good jobs; governments are not helpful and private employers are cautious. I had only two jobs come up for which I was competitive and had to go back to law. It is slow. Otherwise it's been a great year, with time to read, sort out life and priorities, and think about new challenges.

### Disdain and rejection

Some saw their service as an "enormous obstacle" to employment, particularly for older job-seekers at a time when the unemployment rate is very high. Many found themselves treated disdainfully by a society which apparently had forgotten or rejected them. Particularly hard-hit were those who had been defeated. For francophones especially, even those who had found Parliament a useful path to public recognition, "la défaite" loomed large as an obstacle to a return to everyday life.

Political partisanship is a detriment, especially after a bitter defeat like that undergone by the party.



Life after a defeat was quite different. I feel that my time in politics has drastically curtailed my credibility when seeking employment. So much for service to one's country.

### "A major loss in one's life"

The psychological adjustment was often difficult. There was an immediate loss of "the perks of power" and a widespread feeling, even among those who retired, that "the public do not understand".

After 14 years in Parliament and two months of tough campaigning, suddenly....

Even though I maintained my personal business connection, the transition psy-

chologically was a trying one. I probably made some decisions that I otherwise would not have.

I felt I had contributed for many years and was abandoned by everyone. So f... you. I'll do it all over again myself. There were no jobs in industry and no jobs in law. Or was it because of being tainted by Mulrone?y?

Even though I had expected to be defeated, I found the adjustment very difficult. Although I am relatively happy with my new position, it has been a tough emotional and physical challenge to re-establish myself. My health has declined and

there is no doubt that the defeat and the adjustment has been a factor.

### Out-of-date

It came as a shock to some who had expected to resume their former profession to find that path blocked because they were out of date and out of stream.

I had hoped to return to my career in human resources. However, while I thought five years as an M.P. would be an asset, it turns out that it left me with a gap of five years hands-on experience

that those I compete against have.

To join a law firm you could come as a new hire but you didn't have a list of clients — so they were polite but not interested.

### “An impediment to employment”

Whatever the overall feeling about the time spent in Parliament, it seldom improved post-parliamentary employment prospects. The majority of respondents thought that political experience was considered a negative and that politicians are held generally in low es-

teem, disdain or disrepute. One saw this reflecting a change in public attitude from when he entered Parliament.

Being a politician in these times is definitely **not** an asset in the job search.

My broader experience meant more career choice but prospective employers shun my application.

My experience as an M.P. was a major hindrance to finding employment.

Not all had a negative experience. For one respondent, credibility was a factor in the offer of a business partnership and one found government experience useful in his private sector work of helping companies seek international business. Development of knowledge of Canada and the workings of government and relations with leaders in government, business and the community were cited as gains. Another considered his improved outreach and communication skills an invaluable asset and had discovered “I'm a people person.” Training in environment plus experience on environment committees, both at Queen's Park and in Ottawa, helped one defeated Member get a teaching job.

### No past-parliamentarians need apply

The greatest obstacle to successful transition for defeated Members was, as noted, the adverse reaction of many potential employers, and the obvious lack of appreciation of Parliament as a useful career experience — apart from

### Transition is a lengthy process

“The transition from defeat, after nine years in the House, to looking ahead once more, is a lengthy process. The immediate post-election adrenalin fades fast, but does push one into immediate casting about for options — most of it futile because one has made no longer-term plan and because potential employers are thinking not of one's talents but of one's immediate, post-defeat state. This begins to change after some months, with a more strategic approach to restructuring one's life.

Contemporary society considers a period in Parliament to be a strong detriment to employment. One's profile is too prominent; one is assumed to have lost touch with professional developments in one's field; one is felt to be a difficult element to work into a team. The suspicion is that one's presence will hurt in relations with the new government. There is a concern that one is filling time until a return to politics is possible.

More seriously, there is a profound misunderstanding of the incredible learning experience that being an M.P. represents. That one has managed two offices, juggled committee, constituency and party responsibilities, dealt with complex legislative and administrative issues, and developed communication skills, counts for nothing. In fact, the experience is considered a disadvantage.

Going into business for oneself is the obvious way to make use of the learning experience. This needs to be provided as a potential post-parliamentary alternative to the the politically sensitive pension.”

any sense of time spent there as service to the country. One respondent felt himself "a pariah in the eyes of potential employers". Another questioned "whether Canadian business realizes the contribution a former M.P. can make" and concluded that "political activity is a liability". Others were told by executive search firms that government political experience was not an asset or found that the private sector placed little value on parliamentary experience.

Even where it caught prospects' attention and gave me profile, it was seen as implying partisanship, controversy and bias.

Whatever experience/ability/merit I may have is negated by being 'offside' politically and by concerns about patronage.

A lot of people believe M.P.s don't work when in office and experience gained as an M.P. is viewed as a detriment.

People thought that, having been an M.P., I wouldn't be willing to accept regular work.

They daren't approach you because they believe, incorrectly, that you'll ask for a big salary.

Public perception of M.P. salaries and experience makes it difficult to re-enter the work place at entry or mid-management level.

For one former member of the Government side of the House, "public attitude was a considera-

*"There is a belief that there is an easy transition from public to professional life. Nothing could be further from the truth."*

tion in not re-establishing the family business, closed as a result of going to Parliament." One who had 'landed well' recognized that "too many of my colleagues experienced great difficulty in obtaining credible employment. There were problems, financial as well as social. Neither the public nor the media is interested."

#### **Double jeopardy**

Some found themselves in double jeopardy.

It left me out of date in my profession and viewed negatively as a "freeloader on the community".

I was denied interviews for four positions because of my

"political involvement". Others turned me down because I had been "out of the job market for too long".

#### **Physician, hire thyself**

One answer was to arrange one's own future by becoming self-employed, usually as a consultant. Some found it a challenge to see what they could develop on their own. One started two business partnerships, although it took a year to create enough income to live on, and another (who re-established a consulting business) took six months to find the first big contract. Another bought her own business and others, particularly farmers, were fortunate to retain their businesses while in Parliament.

### **The biggest disappointment**

"The biggest disappointment in leaving Parliament is to learn how little value is placed on the experience one gains as an M.P., and indeed as a cabinet minister. Amongst potential employers and the public, politicians are held in low regard and former politicians are not thought to bring experience of use to non-political organizations or institutions.

Though not a surprise, the second reality one learns about political service is the opportunity cost of leaving one's career. Every one of my professional contemporaries is financially better off; the person who took the position I vacated to run for Parliament has a net worth today several times mine. Yet, the media and book shelves are full of stories depicting politicians as greedy, selfish, overpaid and over-pensioned.

Serving in Parliament is a terrific honour and a wonderful experience. But I advise any person thinking about a political career to ensure that he or she has built a personal estate for family obligations after politics."



*"I was not welcomed by my former employer."*

A younger M.P. had been self-employed at the age of 27 and found it easy to return. For one self-employed respondent, "experience as an M.P. was not a factor", while another considered nine years in Parliament sufficient and returned with relief to the practice of law.

Previous self-employment did not always translate into a successful re-entry. One former M.P. found it very difficult to revive his corporate law practice. For another, it had proved impossible to maintain continuity in his accounting business. A third, resuming a practice after a 10-year absence, said "the client base has disappeared and so, frankly, has your current knowledge of the profession".

A partner had sold his interest in a practice in 1984 "in order to avoid any conflict of interest problems and because I made a commitment to devote myself full-time to my M.P. duties". Another found "re-establishing in my own business tougher than expected and a significant financial hardship".

There is a belief that there is an easy transition from public to professional life. Nothing could be further from the truth. House of Commons responsibilities meant I had to turn over operation of my business to a third party. The result was the closing of that business be-

cause of the loss of a client base loyal to me. These are now clients of my former competition and have no desire to return immediately. Remember, I left them to go to Ottawa; they did not leave me.

**Not welcomed back**

Return was even more difficult for a number who had had a paid job before becoming an M.P. and had looked to returning to their former place of employment. In a few cases, they had had to resign on becoming a Member. Others "assumed" they had an understanding but actual agreements, formal or informal, did not always mean a happy return. One defeated M.P. noted simply that: "I was not welcomed by my former employer." Another said that reintegration, three months after "the defeat", was "extremely painful". In one case, "there was some resentment expressed publicly by new colleagues that a 'has-been' politician was being hired."

Timing was a problem for one M.P., who "could not go back to teaching because the election fell at the beginning of the school year and all positions were filled".

Formal leave was not always a protection. One respondent "could not comfortably re-enter my field at age 52, given the advances in computer science and electronic technology." A woman who returned to "an equivalent job" was very glad that she was on a formal leave of absence. A public broadcaster, despite what he considered the law as it relates to those who run for election, has to complete a



“two-year purgatory” and move to another city before being re-admitted on a full-time basis. A year before the election, another Member had faced the Hobson’s Choice of returning to his position to qualify for pre-retirement leave or resigning. One who did return found there were no teaching positions available and that the alternative “pays at least \$25,000 less than I would have received for teaching”.

There were several forms of subtle rebuff, rejection ... or reality:

My employer offered me something different that I couldn’t do. I was asked to follow a refresher course as I had been out 10 years.

I had an agreement but was taken back on a part-time basis only, because I was ‘out of date’.

I had a very informal agreement. The position offered was at two-thirds my former pay. Many of those in my peer group of 1988 had been promoted to positions elsewhere in the company; I had thought my five years would represent a unique management exercise. I also encountered a new management structure which resulted in having to deal with people who did not know my work history.

After 10 years, the position had changed significantly. Those I had worked with were gone and it was very difficult to talk with a new generation and deal with a new situation.

### *“My wife wanted me out!”*

My former employer was not in a position to honour the offer because he is now very downsized.

One Member could have returned but found the challenge insufficient. For him, as for a number of others, consulting was one option.

I did some consulting as a filler, but there was not much work. Twelve months later, I joined a firm but have to study, write exams and get licensed.

I have begun to provide consulting in my specialty. However, it takes time (three years) to build the number of clients into a satisfactory level of income.

#### **Promotion carries penalties**

Did service as a minister, parliamentary secretary or committee chair help Members find employment?

Certainly not!

My ministerial and party affiliation hindered my search. The two-year waiting period for ministers is unfair.

Cabinet experience was no great help...not compared to the loss of income opportunities over 17 years.

Dealing with a former minister intrigues potential employers or clients — but the post-political stigma is more damaging than the intrigue is beneficial.

#### **Family (finally?) first**

Family considerations covered the gamut from “nil” to “extremely important”. Several male respondents recognized that the change was equally hard, or harder, on their wives (“my spouse is also seeking work”) and families. Some saw it as a time to atone. One stressed the “capital importance” of spending time with his wife and children after nine years of absence. “My family had already sacrificed their share because of politics,” said another. “My wife does not wish to relocate...which slowed the job search,” noted a third.

I wanted to “re-connect” with my wife and two youngest children. My older children had moved while I was on the parliamentary road.

Our pension income meets our financial needs and we cherish the chance to do things we think valuable (including even some politics). We spend more time than before visiting family and grandchildren.

Family comes first.

I was tired of the constant demands of a large rural constituency and the adverse effects on family life of being an M.P.

After 14 years of commuting, it was time for stability in family life.

I didn’t run and I didn’t seek employment. I was retirement

## *"Don't buy a house or apartment in Ottawa; rent."*

age at dissolution, with 14 years in the House. I wanted more time with my wife, three married sons and eight grandchildren.

I wanted to be closer to the family, to lead a relaxed, private life.

The change in the status of the working woman put a modern spin on the male search for work: one spouse's law practice restricted an ex-M.P.'s mobility. A second "moved to another area because of my wife's commitments". The effect was often positive: "My wife, fortunately, is

highly employable and therefore able to subsidize me while I build a new business from ground zero." Or crucial: "My spouse's employment has been essential to our financial well-being." Another noted that "My spouse is my business partner." A former Member's wife "has a profession and I can share it a little more." And one remained in Ottawa because "my wife has a job here she really likes." The spouse played a strong role in one M.P.'s decision not to contest in 1993: "My wife wanted me out!"

Wives welcomed the new way of life:

It's been the best year of the last ten.

For the first time in 14 years, he'll be home to help with the Christmas tree!

Children were often of equal importance and schooling ranked very high in some decisions, especially for one defeated M.P. with three children in elementary school. Older children were affected too:

As my oldest is about to enter university, I had hoped my retirement allowance would be available to fund his education, if necessary. It has been required to keep up the mortgage.

My wife is working, but three of our four children in their twenties are still at home.

It was common to stay in the community for economic and family reasons. A former M.P. "sought international contracts but had no desire to leave family and friends — and it was not economically viable". Another discovered the importance of long-time friends: he was offered employment by one.

### **Home is where the work is — sometimes**

Most Members opted for a "return to my roots"; one explained that "in the Abitibi, you can survive anything". Some "gave no consideration" to leaving.

I have a small farm and a family. And I might run again.

I returned to my native region...and my natural clientele.

### **The perks of power**

"When elected, every M.P. is accorded "perks". These include (with limitations): travel for the M.P., spouse, family and staff; access to parliamentary restaurants; and free telephone within Canada. An M.P. also qualifies for a living allowance (improperly called "tax free" income) and, after six years, a pension.

Comments in the media and by Canadians as a whole suggest that these privileges are not necessary to the job.

**Travel** privileges allow the M.P. to function in the manner now expected...to be available in the riding, for example, each weekend and on special occasions. The allowances compel the M.P. to travel. For a western riding, the trip can include five hours on a plane and hundreds of miles by car, and an overnight stop. The return is usually by "red-eye special". An M.P. can use a few travel points to visit other regions — a requisite for understanding Canada.

**Parliamentary restaurants** mean that hundreds of staff and the 295 M.P.s don't have to leave the Hill to eat. If M.P.s were on an expense allowance which included meals while in Ottawa, the cost would be much higher. In the formal dining room, each caucus has a table; perhaps more ways to solve riding problems are found there than at any other place in Ottawa. The dining room is used as much or more by senior Hill staff and the media but I don't remember the media reporting this."

I preferred a more relaxed, stable life-style.

Although most Members returned to their communities, one succumbed to the offer of "a dream job" 300 km away. A man owned a house and had children in school "but if I had been offered employment elsewhere I would have taken it." Another lives in the community "but would move without hesitation" while a third was "unable to find a position of sufficient substance to justify moving". One "had to move because political service had rendered me ineligible for many local jobs."

Geography played an important part in re-entry, as it had for many Members during their parliamentary service.

I had no offers in my home town — all in Toronto. My spouse then had to build a Toronto consulting base.

There's no work in the city. In the region there's a little but you are quickly forgotten when you go in for politics.

One West Coast Member had no possibility of maintaining his business in the constituency, even though he returned to the riding every weekend. Another saw a disparity between urban and rural opportunities and there were differences between urban centres.

I moved from Montreal to Toronto, where there are better opportunities in the not-for-profit sector.

#### **Ottawa first — or last!**

There were mixed views about the seat of Parliament and at

*"I also felt that a younger person should have a chance to serve."*

least one looked for work in Ottawa but ended up returning to his hometown. One woman, faced with a moving problem, had practical advice: "Don't buy a house or apartment in Ottawa; rent." Another, who had lived in Ottawa for 10 years before retiring, sought an Ottawa appointment.

I remained in Ottawa because of the children's schooling but am awaiting the opportunity to relocate.

I sought work in the community where I worked (40 interviews). I could have gone to Toronto, where there was more opportunity, but chose to stay in Ottawa and am now starting a new career.

One tried, unsuccessfully, to leave. Others declined to stay, in spite of (because of?) having spent many years in Ottawa.

I moved to gain perspective — and I would not relocate in the National Capital.

#### **Money is a problem**

Financial considerations, or finances themselves, proved critical. One came out of "la défaite" with a low vote and a high debt...\$28,000. Another emerged "generally happy — though still financially insecure", a common reaction.

I didn't think much about finance before but I think a lot about it now. I won't

starve, thanks to the pension plan, but....

After five years in the House, I had to sell my home of 25 years and take a job a lot less lucrative than the one I held before I was elected. My savings are gone.

I could not afford to retire.

Public (mis)conceptions rubbed salt in wounds.

M.P.s are underpaid: the public thinks they are overpaid.

They seem to believe that all of us have high pensions (mine is \$28,500) and are all appointed to boards and agencies and that all of us have income from these of well over \$100,000 annually.

If I had to retire (after 22 years in the House) on my "gold-plated" pension of \$46,000. Without additional income from a job, I would be in tough shape.

M.P. salaries are very much out of line with those in law. The longer you are in the House, the worse off you'll be.

There is a mistaken belief that all politicians are "looked after" and have huge pensions.

*"One area where former M.P.s are in demand is that of voluntary service."*

#### **Farewell to arms**

Looked after or not, most M.P.s who retired rather than running again seemed glad the experience was behind them. Age, burn-out, sickness or simple fatigue were major factors in the obvious sense of relief. Weariness of public resentment towards politicians and the perception that it was time for a change were other reasons cited by those who quit while they were ahead.

I had been in office long enough.

My wife and I could not run as fast as we had done before.

Flights between Northern B.C. and Ottawa are crippling.

I was just fed up. I'd been around long enough. I needed new challenges.

I represented a huge rural

riding seven days a week with no holidays!

They shoot horses, don't they?

I was 64 years old when the 1993 election was called.

21 years is a long while. And I had a health problem.

I'd had enough. It was time to leave. And there was the desire to increase my income.

I hoped I would still have time to build a retirement estate.

A combined federal and provincial career (almost unbroken) of 28 years was long enough.

I'd served 15 years and had no burning desire to continue. Politics ruined my first marriage; I wanted to be home more.

I wanted family time. And I didn't want to make politics a career.

I'd served over 19 years as an M.P. and had three children in school.

I wanted a quiet period away from politics, after so many years in the limelight.

I felt I had learned as much as I was likely to as an M.P. but was not likely to be invited to use this expertise.

Sometimes the decision was philosophical (political?).

The House of Commons came to seem less relevant to the twentieth century, being an elitist structure created to suit the needs of an agrarian-based imperial society.

I no longer liked my role. There is little place for a real legislator, with possibility to influence or change. It's not surprising that so many Members want to be ministers and, when they are, are generally afraid of being returned to the role of a simple backbencher.

Parliament has become disfunctional.

The easiest adaptation, not surprisingly, was by those in their sixties, whether or not they chose to retire before the election.

I hadn't planned to retire but I'm at retirement age so when I was defeated I did retire, after 14 years in the

#### **No position as interesting**

"There is no position as interesting or demanding as that of Member of Parliament. From this position of public trust, one can serve the ends of justice for fellow citizens and enhance the calibre of government. Now that part of my life is concluded, the rediscovery of private time enables me to be master of a smaller universe, sharing with my wife our interests, as well as with other family members and friends.

In my post-parliamentary life, I have not become a lobbyist or sought to "cash-in" on my years of public office. I seek enough income from various sources to remain independent and to be true to the calling to public service, whether or not I am in Parliament."

House. It's quite a relief. I hadn't realised how much stress and strain there was.

At age 62, after 25 years as an educator and 22 years in politics (municipal, provincial and federal), I wished to retire.

After nearly 15 years, there was time for one more thing/career before health/age became too large a factor. I also felt that a younger person should have a chance to serve.

I was 67, and still able to do some part-time medical practice.

### Help wanted

One area where former M.P.s are in demand is that of voluntary service, from organizing motor boat races to political party rebuilding. Even those who did not go looking for unpaid work found themselves tracked down and offered some — sometimes too much. United Way was a frequent seeker of their experience. Various charitable foundations, churches, heritage groups, schools and universities, hospital boards, service clubs, Red Cross, educational boards, amateur hockey teams, credit unions, international think tanks, social housing operators, political groups, national councils, veterans' organizations and other n.g.o.s, saw the value in using former Members, frequently as chairs of boards.

I'm active with my church and the local college and I'm chair of a committee

### This great plus

"Adjustments are painful personally and for the family. There is a feeling of loss, as severe as a death in the family, and a loss of self-identity.

It is extremely difficult to pick yourself up and begin knocking on doors for work. The most painful aspect is the feeling of abandonment; once you've lost, it's like you've dropped off the face of the earth.

But there is this great plus: time with your family to explore the satisfaction of a normal lifestyle. You begin to realize how much you've sacrificed: the time away, travel and the never-ending criticism that "you're all in it for yourselves".

It doesn't matter what kind of job you've done, you can be swept aside at a whim — nothing personal, "just politics". No bloody wonder you become cynical.

Would I do it again? Politics and family simply do not mix. Maybe by the time my children are grown I'll regain the belief that you really can do something of value through elected office."

restructuring a manufacturing plant.

I'm working on literacy and human rights. My interest was much increased as a result of Commons service, especially in human rights within the federal civil service.

I was asked to join service clubs and do volunteer fundraising but said "not at this time" to most. I did become chairman of a community fund-raiser — many members of this board had been solid supporters.

I've not sought voluntary work but the offers have come. People imagine that, because of the pension, you can do things without remuneration.

The experience of both retired and defeated Members covered the gamut of community needs: local recreation committee; task force on long-term health care; economic development board; housing coop; "exploration of the Christian and socialist bases for defeating the destructive rule of capitalist corporations"; community crime prevention; restoring historical buildings; restructuring businesses; a house for victims of family violence.

The assumption was that the expertise came free ("I gave advice — but not for a fee."), with occasional exceptions: "I was appointed to a part-time position on a provincial board, with some payment."

### Is there life after Parliament Hill?

Yes there is. In my case, there is significant interest in and involvement with my

*"It was a great privilege to serve."*

young family. There appears to be no particular financial, emotional, or geographical problem to cope with — unless they are yet to appear!

You make of it what you will. I have a large library and am cataloguing 200 books on Canadian Prime Ministers.

I feel much happier, in an interesting job and with an income that I can derive savings from. I'm not shelling out money any more. For the first time in 22 years, I can plan weekends and holidays with my wife. And when the phone rings it's almost always a happy conversation! Yes, I'm glad to be out. I have also been very lucky.

Yes! But opportunities arise in unexpected areas — and through unexpected contacts.

There is, but it is too early to describe the quality. In two or three years it will be easier to know with precision.

There is life — if you have had relevant experience be-

fore going to Parliament. I have never had anyone approach me for my experience as an M.P. or a minister. The parliamentary experience is not understood — is actually despised in most instances. A pre-political reputation allows you to revisit pre-political contacts. Even then, the risk is that these are out of date.

I am not seeking full-time employment but opportunities to work in an interesting way.

Yes. I now make all my own mistakes, without dependency on my party, government or voters. It is possible to recover amateur status in politics, although it is very hard to learn to say "No" to over-commitment of my time.

I have adjusted quite well; my family has been wonderful. I went back to school immediately to study global economics and computers. I am a director of two public companies as well as three non-profit organizations.

You must come to grips with reality. If you expect to

have the same support as you had in Parliament, you're sure to fail. But you are capable of surmounting obstacles. It's a question of attitude, not aptitude.

I was elected first in 1980, defeated in 1984, re-elected in 1988 and retired in 1993. After the 1984 election, I returned to the family farm very conscious of the stigma attached to being a defeated M.P. However, we carried on within the community doing all the things that we did as individuals or as a family before. In contrast, since retiring, I find people coming up to me on the streets, or at a fall fair, to talk for a few moments — people I don't know but who know who I am. I was looked down on in defeat and looked up to in retirement!

I will never regret pursuing a parliamentary career, nor do I regret running again, to be defeated, in October 1993. It was a great privilege to serve.

*Jeffrey Holmes is a Parliamentary Centre Consultant and former Financial Post Journalist. He was guided in the preparation of this article by Peter Dobell, Director of the Parliamentary Centre.*

## RESPONSE PROFILE

PARTY			
	NDP	PC	OTHER
DEFEATED	8	40	0
RETIRED	4	15	4

AGE						
	30 - 39	40 - 49	50 - 59	60 - 69	70+	Average
DEFEATED	5	10	26	6	1	53.0
RETIRED	0	3	10	9	1	58.6

*Parliamentary Government* placed each response on a scale from -5 to +5, to provide a (dis)satisfaction indicator after a year of transition. This, basically intuitive, ranking produced the following estimates:

DEFEATEDS		
PLACEMENT	SCORE	COMMENTS
23 Negative scores	total -65	Negatives commented with greater intensity
1 Neutral score		
24 Positive scores	total +60	

RETIRED S		
PLACEMENT	SCORE	COMMENTS
4 Negative scores	total -6	Substantial majority of moderately positive reactions
1 Neutral score		
18 Positive scores	total +46	

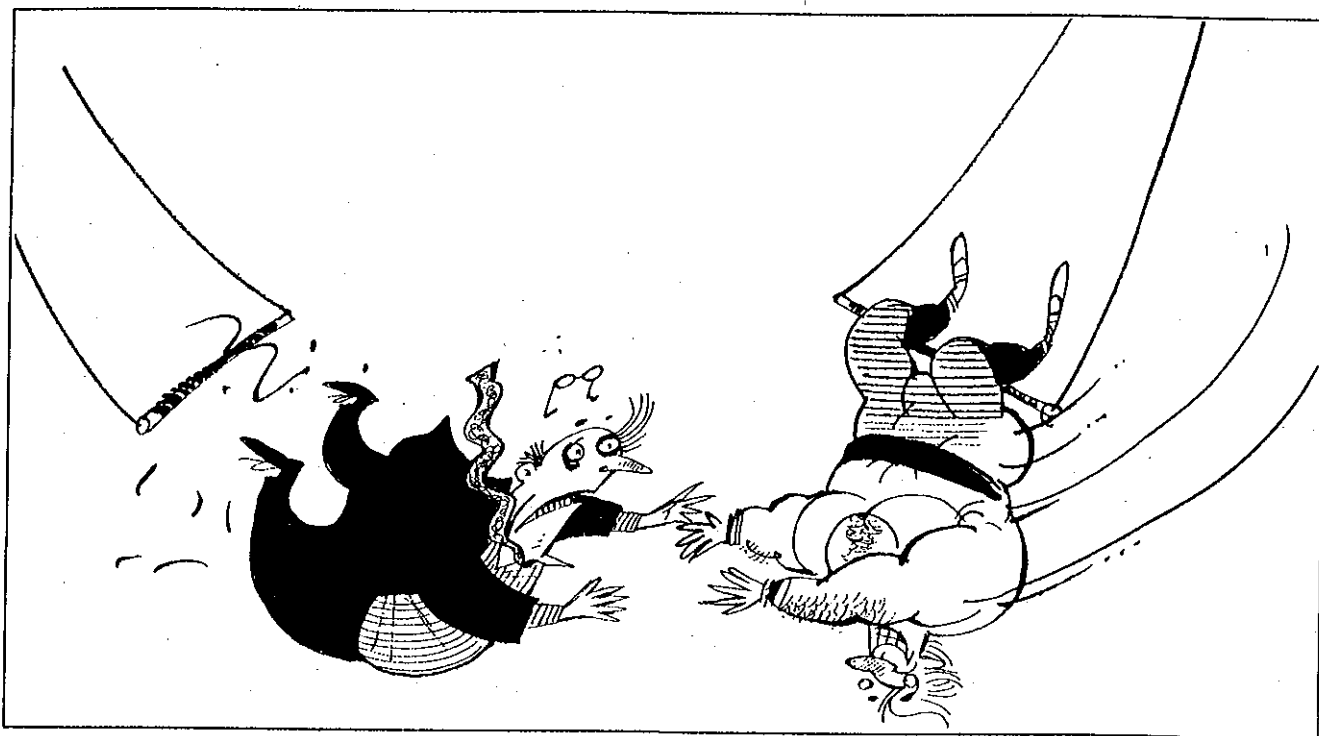
DEFEATED PC:	20 Negative	1 Neutral	19 Positive
RETIRED PC:	3 Negative	1 Neutral	11 Positive
DEFEATED NDP:	3 Negative		5 Positive
RETIRED NDP:	1 Negative		3 Positive
RETIRED OTHER:			4 Positive



	<b>QUESTIONNAIRE</b>	<b>RETURNS</b>	<b>PERCENTAGES</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	200	71	35
Defeated	130	48	37
Retired	70	23	33
<b>MALE</b>	177	67	38
Defeated	113	44	
Retired	64	23	
<b>FEMALE</b>	23	4	17
Defeated	17	4	
Retired	6		
<b>ENGLISH</b>	145	56	39
Defeated	91	35	
Retired	54	21	
<b>FRENCH</b>	55	15	27
Defeated	39	13	
Retired	16	2	
<b>ATLANTIC</b>	10	4	
<b>QUÉBEC</b>	54	16	
<b>ONTARIO</b>	77	30	
<b>PRAIRIES</b>	36	16	
<b>BRIT. COL.</b>	23	5	

**NOTE:** "Defeated" means Members defeated in the 1993 election.  
"Retired" means Members who did not run in the 1993 election.

The female response rate, from a much smaller number approached, is lower than the male. Phone comments from two females who did not return the questionnaire are included in the article. However, the responses revealed no evident differences in the female post-parliamentary experience.



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## The Resettlement Program Wins Parliamentarians' Plaudits

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*The Resettlement Provisions and Winding-up Provisions received generally high marks, with several finding the program "extremely helpful", although there were caveats or suggestions for improvement.*

### **Resettlement Program Helps**

These program are essential. It is very difficult to adjust to a new lifestyle. Since the position of M.P. is all-encompassing and very rewarding, it is hard to find work or activities that meet expectations and fulfilment.

While I have not yet "landed" satisfactorily, the resettlement was most useful in assisting me in facing the realities of today.

Without the resettlement allowance and severance benefits, I would have been in deep financial difficulty. It

took eight months of plugging before I was able to re-establish steady work.

One respondent regretted not having taken advantage of the program. Another also could have used more time.

It would have been useful

*"It is a very good initiative, offering retraining and practical steps back into circulation."*

but I went through a period of denial where I was waiting to take a good job. Now it's too late.

If the help had been spread over 24 months, rather than 12, I could have used it. I live 500 miles from Montreal. With four trips to discuss the plan and two to Ottawa, there was not enough time.

The program helped on a practical level through consultant services and advice on such matters as investment potential and inventories of career or business opportunities, thus allowing former Members time to reflect before making choices.

Travel/telephone/secretarial/vocational counselling helped me explore options and keep "in the loop".

Funding provided counselling along with training for a company which I bought into.

A number of former Members took advantage of education and training suggestions, including university courses.

It is a very good initiative, offering retraining and practical steps back into circulation. I started Spanish and other courses and still only used 1/3 to 1/2 of available help. We owe a lot to those who brought in this program.

I attended the Queen's University executive course and also went through an outplacement agency.

I attended professional development seminars and cultivated new professional opportunities with Resettlement assistance.

I took a Spanish course so I could work with Mexico.

Again there were some who found the time too short "when schooling is involved" or the amount insufficient. Others did not like what they saw as self-defeating controls.

It was helpful but the rules were too restrictive in many areas. If the budget is to be X dollars, then accept that it will be spent by each individual in a proper manner.

I was refused permission to administer my allowance.

There were particular concerns about restrictions on setting up a private business in one's home. The limit to the rental of a computer, for example, discouraged one former Member who had become computer-literate as a base for renewed activity.

If I rent space to look for a job, that is an allowable expense, but if I work from my house, no money is paid...absolutely crazy when you consider the number of home-based workers today. I still do a lot of public speaking and letter-writing. I very much miss my personal and secretarial help and naturally had to set up a modest "office" in my home. The amount allocated for this aspect of retirement is **not adequate**.

For one former Member, getting there was half the battle.

Moving chattels was a help.

A lack of clear information on what is available and poor com-

### **More flexibility needed**

"The money for Resettlement and Wind-up is relatively sufficient but:

- a) support should be spread over two years instead of one. I did go back to university but one cannot gain enough credits in twelve months. By the time I cleaned out my office and apartment in Ottawa, Christmas was here. To enrol at a school or university takes time and thought. I would have been able to accomplish my goals, given more time.
- b) to be successful today, one must have a computer. School fees are looked after for one year but buying machinery is not supported.
- c) job search is very difficult. Many colleagues have had massive problems."

munication, particularly in regard to financial provisions, was seen as a resettlement problem by one respondent.

It is absurd to require that a lawyer authorize our bank to accept RRSP money. Why can't this money go into a registered pension fund? And why must we complete all steps before we get our severance pay?

*"The public believes, as the result of media hype, that all M.P.s receive a pension."*

Severance pay was seen as too little and too short by some, including one respondent who wanted it doubled, along with a full year's salary. Other suggestions:

Severance pay should be at least a year — perhaps for younger ex-M.P.s. There should be greater flexibility in

expenses for those who live on the edges of the country.

Severance pay should continue on a monthly basis for six months until other issues have been settled. While some Members have other income, many need their pay cheque.

### **The centre of our discontent**

"The M.P.s pension plan is the focus of discontent. Formulated in the early '80s, the plan is generous but not generally understood. Any M.P. elected since 1984 has considered the pension plan as part of a pay package but only about 50% collect a pension. At six years of service, one qualifies for a 30% pension, indexed only after age 60.

Every M.P. with less than 15 years service pays 10% of salary, plus 1% for eventual indexing. Thus, contributions are much larger than average, but benefits are 2.5 times the average and payable at a younger age.

The pension plan was enriched because governments have been reluctant to pay a wage compared to that which many earned in the private sector; and governments ignore regular reviews that recommend a higher wage. The pension was enriched, too, in recognition that years in service may hinder one in developing business or professional income.

A recent study of the pension plan and pay package recommended changes that included increases in pay. It also recommended delaying pensions until a certain age and an end to "double dipping" by former M.P.s with a salary from an appointed position. I suggest these changes would create the need for others, for instance all government pensions should end if one is appointed to an agency.

M.P.s should be given the same rights as every other government employee, i.e. to have the pension vested. If no pension has been earned at the time of retirement, the M.P. should have the same right to a severance package as every other Canadian worker.

#### **Use entry level income**

I start from the premise that no one should be penalized for being a Member of Parliament. Former M.P.s should be able to provide for themselves and their families at the income level at which they entered the public arena.

Upon election to the House, the elected person declares his or her level of income, based on the most recent tax return. Upon defeat, that income level becomes the starting point for the separation package. This point can be lower than the base salary of an M.P. but should be adjusted down to that level if it is above.

Entry level income should be guaranteed for a period, with the package reduced by any income from other taxable sources. Support should taper off over three to five years."

Severance pay should be paid, even if he or she will draw a pension.

Compared to other pensions, M.P.s' are not high. Good separation pay would be useful if you are not going to pay more pension.

**Pensions a perennial problem**

Pensions seem a perennial parliamentary problem — and public relations headache.

The public believes, as the result of media hype, that all M.P.s receive a pension (I was elected in 1988) and that it is large. As I have not found visible means of support, many in my community believe I am on the pension plan.

It was essential I find employment. I do not believe the pension adequate in view of the needs.

One respondent suggested keeping the pension as is, except:

- a) all M.P.s receive a separation allowance of 6 months minimum to a maximum of 12 months, based on years of service;
- b) no pension until severance package is over; and
- c) no pension until age 55.