

# LOVE THE PENSION SHARKS

## REPUBLICANS IN THE HOUSE PROVE THEIR DEVOTION.

**Warm Debate Over the Urgent Deficiency Bill—The Grand Old Party Purposes to Look Out for the Pension Agents, Whose Contributions to Campaign Funds Have Always Been Welcome—Some of the Recent Frauds Outlined.**

WASHINGTON, Dec. 16.—The pension sharks set their men at work in the House to-day. The urgent deficiency bill was taken up, with its proposed appropriation for carrying on the work of the Pension Office, and there straightway followed a debate on the pension policy of the Administration, in which it appeared that the session will find the Republicans fighting for the reckless use of money for pensioners that was characteristic of the last Administration, and that the pension attorneys of Washington hope to see the policy of the Administration that was to follow Harrison's.

Several Republican orators were heard in denunciation of the efforts of the Administration to discover and stop fraudulent pensions, but not one Republican spoke in favor of persisting in a policy that will weed out the unworthy and make the pension roll a roll of honor.

It was to be expected that the party that made the bill of 1890, at the behest of the greedy pension agents, would come to the defense when it was found that the business of pension stuffing was on the decrease. Men who have made millions out of pensioners, and who have been willing to give hundreds to every Republican campaign committee, have discredited all the reports of the discovery of fraudulent pensioners, and have set about the impossible task of proving that the fact that a man is on the pension roll is proof that he is honest, and that he ought to be there.

It will be of no use to them to have the Pension Office produce the proofs that there have been great frauds committed in the name of the veterans, for what they are now seeking is to compel the Democrats to spend more money than is necessary to stop the pensions of the wrong men in as many cases as possible, and to afford the Republicans as many opportunities as possible of gaining the votes of men who have been carried on the pension rolls improperly and who will seek revenge at the polls, if they are permanently removed from the condition of beneficiaries.

The efforts of the Republicans in the House will be put forth to deprive the Pension Office of the means with which to prosecute the inquiries to discover to what extent the pension rolls are fraudulent, and in what degree they can be purged or reduced. Even so enterprising a pension agent as Dudley, before he was a pension agent, gave his opinion about the extent to which frauds had crept into the pension list.

Since that time the pension agents and the professional soldiers and promoters of pension schemes before Congress have increased the temptations to men who were in the army in any capacity, or who offered to be in it, and did not get out of sight of their homes.

Any effort that indicates the eventual reduction of the number of pensioners and applicants for pensions will profoundly move the pension sharks, and they are bound to infuse into the minds and actions of Republican politicians in Congress a good deal of their own feeling of concern about a prospective loss of business.

Early in the morning hour, Mr. Breckinridge (Dem., Ky.), called up the Urgent Deficiency bill and asked that the first reading be dispensed with, to which there was no objection.

The House then went into Committee of the Whole upon the bill, with Mr. Hatch (Dem., Mo.) in the chair. Mr. Cannon took the floor and attacked the Administration's policy of suspending pensions, pending examinations, for fraud.

Mr. Cannon stated that the Commissioner of Pensions and various Chiefs of Divisions of the Pension Office had been called before the Committee on Appropriations and asked many questions in regard to the conduct of business. The Committee on Pensions stated that the actual saving resulting from the investigations for fraud since May 1, when that ruling of Commissioner Lochren went into effect, was something over \$1,000,000.

He said that the Commissioner of Pensions had stated that in the conduct of the business of his office, which disburses from \$150,000,000 to \$160,000,000 to over 1,000,000 persons, there was no more fraud than in the ordinary conduct of business in the courts.

Mr. Enloe (Dem., Tenn.) asked Mr. Cannon who had changed the construction of Order 164.

Mr. Cannon replied that it was done by the present Commissioner of Pensions and the present Secretary of the Interior.

The Fifty-first Congress made two appropriations to meet the requirements of this law, and appropriated \$150,000,000 for pensions, a large proportion of which were adjudicated under that law. When the Fifty-second Congress came in, with its 140 Democratic majority in the House of Representatives, that Congress appropriated the money to meet the requirements of this law, and did it with the approval of the Democratic House.

But in the Appropriation bill of the Fifty-second Congress was an amendment which revoked Rule 164, promulgated during the Administration of President Harrison, which affected 400,000 pensioners. The Democratic House had refused to accept the amendment, and it was stricken out of the bill.

But in May, 1893, with William Lochren Commissioner of Pensions, Hoke Smith Secretary of the Interior, and Grover Cleveland President of the United States, the Pension Office revoked Order 164, thus cutting off about 400,000 pensioners, and had thus committed an act which was akin to a crime.

Mr. Cannon believed that a soldier seventy-five years of age was entitled to a pension and should be put on the list without controversy; he believed that 75 per cent. of the men of that age who had gone through the war were physically and mentally disabled.

Mr. Morse (Rep., Mass.) said he had the application of a man eighty-four years of age, which had been refused by the Pension Office.

Mr. Cannon said he had no doubt of it, but stated that seventy-five years did not necessarily imply physical incapacity, and in support of this assertion he pointed to Mr. Bundy, a Representative from Ohio, who is seventy-six years of age, and to Senator Palmer, from his own State of Illinois, seventy-five years of age, who were able to discharge their duties and keep abreast with the youngest.

Mr. Enloe asked whether a man who was entitled to a pension under the law of 1890 should take precedence of one whose disabilities were of service origin.

Mr. Cannon replied that the law made no distinction on account of the cause of disability. He spoke of the tardiness with which cases were adjudicated under the present Administration, as compared with the previous Administration. He stated that, under the Cleveland Administration, 44,000 certificates had been issued, while during the corresponding period of Gen. Raum's administration of the Pension Office 124,000 pensions had been granted, nearly three times as many.

Mr. Enloe asked whether Mr. Cannon did not know that under the law of 1893 an arrangement had been made whereby the cases could be adjudicated five times as fast as under the previous methods, and that facilities for adjudicating these claims were much better under the previous Administration than under this.

Mr. Cannon said he was not going back to 1890; he was comparing the first seven months of 1893 with the first seven months of 1892. There were 300,000 cases, said Mr. Cannon, awaiting adjudication under the law of 1890, and there are 800,000 cases in jeopardy at this time. "Some one may ask," said Mr. Cannon, in conclusion, "whether I intend to attack the Pension Office. No, I do not; but I intend to attack the atmosphere of the Pension Office, which is now about 20 degrees below normal."

Mr. Livingston (Dem., Ga.) defended the policy of the Administration in regard to pension matters. He defended in particular the Secretary of the Interior, Hoke Smith, and the Commissioner of Pensions, Mr.

Lochren. He spoke of the numerous cases of fraud against the pension laws, and instanced cases in the Arizona, New-Mexico, and Albany districts.

He said that if a Southern man opposed the indiscriminate granting of pensions he was accused of acting with sinister motives; but, as a matter of fact, the Southern soldier had no objection to the granting of pension to a Northern soldier who really deserved it.

It had been stated by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. Cannon) that pensioners were being dropped by Mr. Cleveland, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Lochren. How was that brought about? Hardly by collusion. Mr. Smith was a Southern man, it was true, but he was not a Southern soldier—he was too young. The Commissioner of Pensions was a Northern soldier, and a brave soldier, while Mr. Cleveland was a Northern Democrat.

Mr. Livingston was frequently interrupted by Mr. Van Voorhis, (Rep., N. Y.), Mr. Baker, (Rep., N. H.), Mr. Pickler, (Rep., S. D.), and Mr. Dingley, (Rep., Me.) The latter was so persistent in his interruptions that the debate seemed likely to degenerate into a personal and acrimonious dispute.

The Chairman (Mr. Hatch, Dem., Mo.) endeavored to quell the disturbance and clear the aisles, and he was forced to remind Mr. Dingley and Mr. Livingston that they were not in the Appropriations Committee room, and that the Chair would not allow any such personal dialogue on the floor as the gentlemen were indulging in.

Mr. Lacey (Rep., Iowa) made an earnest speech in favor of the soldiers and in criticism of the Administration. He criticized the policy of the Pension Office in suspending pensions pending an investigation of charges secretly brought.

In Venice in the olden days there was the institution of the "Lion's Mouth," in which charges against any one might be secretly dropped, and the charges would be examined secretly. In our day there was no "Lion's Mouth," but the letter boxes answered the same purpose, and charges sent secretly by mail were investigated, and, pending an investigation, the pensioners were suspended.

Several months ago this Administration had secretly sent out a paramount Commissioner to investigate a matter of international importance, in which the people of the United States were intensely interested, and now it was proposed to send out several thousand paramount Commissioners to secretly search for frauds. Diogenes went about with a lantern, searching for an honest man, but the Pension Office, unlike its prototype, was going about with a lantern, searching for a dishonest man, and its reward would be exceedingly great with the disposition of the department for finding them.

In speaking of the disability pension law, Mr. Lacey said that no matter whether a man was a lawyer or minister, if he was disabled from performing manual labor he was entitled to a disability pension just as much as one who depended upon his labor for his living. He stated that it was supposed that if a law was framed which did not go into the consideration of when, where, or how a disability was acquired, it would relieve the department of the burden of investigating these cases.

The department, however, did not avail itself of the privileges thus obtained, but continued to go into details of the causes of disability. There had been many charges of frauds, he said, but he would like any gentleman on the floor to instance, if he could, any cases occurring in his district.

After a few minutes' delay, Mr. Livingston (Dem., Ga.) stated that he knew of a case of fraud in his district.

"Good!" said Mr. Lacey. "We have one case in Georgia—one case out of many thousands. But what is fraud in Georgia may wear a different aspect in Illinois or Iowa, and it is just possible that the gentleman from Georgia may regard any man who helped to put down the rebellion as having been guilty of fraud."

"In 1863," he said, "the boys went marching through Georgia; in 1893 Georgia goes marching through the boys." He thought the simile drawn by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. Cannon) was most applicable to the case, and he endorsed the statement that the temperature of the Pension Office was 20 degrees below normal. It was a chilly day when a Congressman goes into the Pension Office nowadays to look after the interests of a constituent, said Mr. Lacey. He would see a big stack of papers, and if he asked what they were he would learn that they were applications of men which were being held while they were trying to find out whether these men crawled in under the tent instead of paying admission and coming in at the gate.

Mr. Baldwin (Dem., Minn.) appealed to Mr. Lacey to eliminate sentiment from the discussion.

"Put aside sentiment?" said Mr. Lacey dramatically; "as well put aside patriotism. The Pension Office was built on a foundation of justice on the one hand and on patriotic sentiment on the other."

Mr. Enloe (Dem., Tenn.) addressed the committee. He stated that he had not witnessed any more pitiable spectacle on this floor than the line of defense of the ex-Union soldier adopted by Mr. Lacey. He did not suppose there was an honest ex-Union soldier in the country who would stand up and defend fraud and object to an investigation. He was not surprised that men who were drawing pensions in violation of law should object to an examination, and those who defended such men were in the position of the burglar who watched the dog while his companion looted the house.

He claimed that there were dishonesty, bribery, and illegal proceedings in the Pension Office, and that that office had been honeycombed with fraud for years past, and that the ex-Commissioner of Pensions was in collusion with the pension attorneys throughout the country. He also asserted that Rules 139 and 181 had been put in at the instance of George E. Lemon, a Washington pension attorney, and that these rules had made him a millionaire. He wanted the matter thoroughly investigated, and he wanted no man on the pension roll who was not entitled to it.

In speaking of the pension frauds unearthed in Baltimore, he said that one attorney in that city had had 2,000 vouchers sent to him and had deposited them in the bank to his own account, and had turned them over to the proper claimant only on the payment of a certain percentage. He could not give all the details, because the investigation had not been completed, but the facts were in the line he indicated.

And in speaking of the frauds discovered in New-Mexico, in one instance, he said,

the examiners had found a discrepancy of eight inches between the stature of the man who claimed the pension and his height as given in the description. And in one case in New-Mexico in which the examiners had discovered frauds it was found that the perpetrator was a sub-agent of a Washington pension agency.

He also mentioned the Newby case, in which the original bearer of that name had been killed at Shiloh, yet years afterward a person who had been discharged from a penitentiary in Tennessee appeared in Newby's old home and claimed to be Newby, and the neighbors swore he was Newby. The Government brought forty witnesses who swore that Newby was dead—soldiers in his own regiment, who testified that they had seen him die and were present when he was buried. In conclusion, he said that no more iniquitous law had ever been framed than the law of July 1, 1890.

Mr. Morse (Rep., Mass.) said that he was surprised at the statement made in the President's last message that there were numbers of fraudulent pensioners living in every community. He considered that statement a libel on many brave men and on the Grand Army of the Republic; and Mr. Morse repudiated the statement. He said that the Democrats were too cowardly to strike out pension legislation entirely, but knocked down one man here and another there.

"They execute a pensioner first and try him afterward," was the way he put it. If a man must be a pauper before he can become a pensioner, then he was in favor of abolishing all pension laws and making the pensioners paupers, dependent on the various communities, and not national paupers.

Mr. Morse sent to the clerk's desk and had read the statements and letters of a number of men whose pensions had been disallowed.

At 5:10 the committee rose, after deciding to give three hours to closing the discussion on Monday, one and a half hours to each side, and that Mr. Cannon (Rep., Ill.) should close the debate for the minority and Mr. Breckinridge (Dem., Ky.) for the majority.