

*Pension Acts*

simply that he look at the problem I questioned him about two days ago, and look into the matter of our having a discussion of war veterans allowances before changes are made in the regulations that would embarrass or humiliate our veterans. If the minister does not find a way for us to discuss this matter some of us will.

I believe that pretty well covers the things I want to say at this point, other than the matter which I am making the subject of an amendment. There is one other thing, however. I realize the force of what the minister said about the Hong Kong prisoners having suffered particular hardships and difficulties as a result of which they developed an identifiable condition which seemed to apply to all of them, thus making possible the special treatment they are now being accorded by this bill. It seems to me, however, that the National Prisoners of War Association and the Dieppe Prisoners of War Association have a case in asking for equal or at least comparable treatment. The situation of this group was discussed at great length in the committee both times, when we were on the white paper and again when we were on the bill. The government's position—by that I mean the position of the officials because there were Liberal members in the committee who took the same view we did, but they were not able to prevail—was repeatedly that there is an identifiable condition that attaches to those who were in Hong Kong. We contend that there are also identifiable conditions that apply to prisoners of war under other conditions. I am sorry that in this bill, which is so good and in which we are doing so much, we are not dealing with that group.

● (3:40 p.m.)

As I said, one hopes that now that we have had this very thorough review of veterans legislation it will not be a case of putting it aside for five, ten or 20 years. Let us come back to it in a year or two if, as a result of the workings of this new setup and of the application of the new principles, it becomes obvious to all of us that further improvements should be made. As I said, that is my submission but for one point. I think we have done a pretty good job; I think things will be better, but there are still a number of shortcomings, so many in fact that our mail from disappointed veterans and veterans' widows who feel that we have not yet carried out the obligation of the government of Canada as set out in the proposed new section 1-A of the bill will not be lessened.

I come to my last point which has to do with the maximum amount of the exceptional incapacity allowance. Those who have already spoken today have again indicated what this is, namely a provision to the effect that a 100 per cent pensioner, that is a veteran who is receiving a 100 per cent pension, may under certain conditions qualify for this exceptional incapacity allowance. There is much detail in it that I will not go into at this point, but I have one particular point in mind, namely, the maximum possible amount of that allowance. The Woods report recommended a formula that made possible certain combinations, the result of which could be a maximum allowance of \$7,950 a year. Without getting into an argument as to whether or not that is too

much—I do not think anything is too much in that area—that was the figure in the Woods report with which we started, namely, \$7,950 a year.

When we received the government's white paper and took it to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, the proposed maximum was \$1,200. You can realize that that struck us as an awful comedown from \$7,950. The veterans organizations which appeared before us briefed us effectively through their representatives. They dealt with it in the working parties that were set up between their representatives and the officials, and we came up with a compromise of \$3,500. I emphasize the point that when that figure was arrived at, it was supported by the committee unanimously. Some of us thought we had gone too far down, but in the spirit of the committee we agreed to it, and so recommended to Parliament when the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis), as chairman of that committee, filed our report.

I think that was good committee work, and we were happy about the results of those negotiations. But then we got Bill C-203, and the government offered \$2,400 instead. The line taken by the minister was that the government had doubled its previous offer. That does not mean much. If the government had offered \$1 in the first place and made it \$2 later, that would be doubling the first offer. Two thousand four hundred dollars may be twice \$1,200, but it is a lot less than the Woods recommendation of \$7,950. I do not think it was fair to the members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, who were unanimous on this point, to do this shortchanging and to put the amount at only \$2,400.

**An hon. Member:** What good is the committee system?

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Yes, that is a good question, but it is still true that the committee did a lot of good work. On this point, the committee showed the value of the committee system because the committee which just reported the bill a couple of days ago again recommended by unanimous vote that the amount be \$3,500, but the minister today showed no sign of accepting that recommendation. Every member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs voted twice for the maximum figure to be \$3,500, and I think it is an insult to the members of that committee for the government, in the first place, to put \$2,400 in the bill, and secondly, for the minister to say nothing in respect of our second recommendation on this point. I think all of us on that committee should ask the government to reconsider this matter. I could not move such an amendment at the report stage. I thought of doing this even though I knew it was out of order, but I did not follow that course. It involves the expenditure of money so a private member cannot move it. However, I can move that the bill be not now read a third time but that it be referred back to the standing committee for the purpose of reconsidering that clause, and that is what I shall move in a moment.

I do not want anyone to stand up and say that this is delaying the progress of the bill. It will take a matter of minutes, an hour at the most, if the government is willing to agree to it. If the government is not willing to agree, then of course that is the end of it. I hope that the

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]