

Supply—Veterans Affairs

who were receiving the unemployability supplement in British Columbia, which read as follows:

As a recipient of the unemployability supplement you have been eligible for complete treatment coverage through the Department of Veterans Affairs, and because of this you were exempt from payment of premium to the British Columbia hospital insurance service.

On December 31, 1951, the supplement ceases and with it your entitlement to full treatment coverage; (you will, of course, still be entitled to treatment for your pensioned disability). You are therefore subject to payment of premium under the provincial hospitalization plan, and you are advised to secure this coverage for yourself as soon as possible.

It is signed by the senior treatment medical officer at Vancouver. This is a matter which I called to the attention of the Department of Veterans Affairs before this legislation was brought in, because I realized that it would inflict a very considerable hardship on a large number of veterans. I have had a great many letters on this subject. I am just going to quote two very short paragraphs.

Mr. Abbott: May I appeal to my hon. friend as I have to others? We are going to have a veterans affairs committee. This vote is the direct consequence of the amendments to the Pension Act. I would hope that we can defer discussion on general policy questions such as this until either the main estimates or the amendments to the Pension Act. It is of some importance that we conclude consideration of these estimates this evening, because there are a great many wage claims and others which cannot be paid until the bill has gone through. I was going to ask that perhaps the house might consent to sit shortly after eleven o'clock. I am in the hands of the committee, but there are a good many bills, including salaries of civil servants, that cannot be paid until the necessary appropriation act has been passed by both houses. I would hope that all these questions can be fully considered on the main estimates. I shall try to urge that we do not discuss too much policy on these items. There are certain items here that that does not apply to, and I had hoped that we could get to them.

Mr. Drew: It was indicated this afternoon by the hon. member for Greenwood that we were anxious to facilitate the passing of all items which related to the paying of any money. That proposal was made at the very outset. It was not acceded to. It is quite apparent that these items cannot be concluded tonight, and the government must accept any responsibility for any delay.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Abbott: The government will accept no such responsibility; the house will accept the responsibility.

Mr. Drew: Mr. Chairman, these remarks can be conducted in a manner that is in keeping with the amount that is before the committee. These items first came before the committee this afternoon. They involve a matter of some \$500 million.

Mr. Abbott: No, \$200 million.

Mr. Drew: In the total?

Mr. Abbott: Yes, \$200 million and some odd.

Mr. Drew: That we have been discussing here?

Mr. Abbott: Yes, \$200 million and some odd.

Mr. Drew: The figures that are before the committee today are comparable to many budgets only a comparatively few years ago, and there are items that will be under discussion for some time. The Minister of Agriculture was not available at the time his items came up, and these are appropriate items to bring up to date the discussion on an extremely important subject. While we are anxious to facilitate the passing of these items, we are certainly not willing to foreclose the discussion on a subject that is of the utmost importance not only to hon. members but to the whole of Canada, and therefore we do not intend to agree to the extension of time. This can be proceeded with on Monday and dealt with in a proper way.

Mr. Abbott: I am quite prepared to accept that, Mr. Chairman, of course, but I want to make it perfectly clear to several thousand civil servants, whose cheques would normally have gone out today, that the responsibility for the failure to get them out belongs to the House of Commons.

Mr. Drew: Mr. Chairman, up to this point these items had been dealt with in a spirit that suggested that we were likely to proceed on a somewhat amicable basis. This is simply another example of the attempt of this government to force items through in a way that denies discussion, and it is the duty of the opposition, which the opposition intends to accept, to see that these items are subject to proper examination. We do not intend to have it said that we have delayed items which are only brought before this house on the Friday before the end of the month. They could have been before us two weeks ago, with ample time to discuss them and have any detail there is. The government is doubly responsible.

This afternoon the hon. member for Greenwood afforded an opportunity to dispose of all items involving payment, to get them