

tion, by those who for years have advocated the cause of these poor women—the soldiers' organizations and the friends of dependents of soldiers generally.

To understand what the position now is which the minister says will be relieved, one should bear in mind that in the past only those widows were entitled to pension whose husbands drew fifty per cent disability pension. That is to say, those who drew pensions less than on the fifty per cent basis were not entitled to a continuance of the payments made to the soldier when he finally passed on, unless of course it was possible to prove that the husband died as a result of injuries directly related in some way to the war.

I think we all know that practically all the men who took part in trench warfare from 1914 to 1918 returned as casualties. We know that, and their wives and their widows know it. But it is another matter to prove direct connection between the loss of life and the war. It is much easier to be satisfied of that in your own mind than to bring evidence sufficient to prove it to the meticulous gentlemen who sit on the pensions board. And so it is that very few, comparatively speaking, have been able to jump that hurdle and actually prove that the death of the husband was the result of war service. Pensions accordingly have been restricted for the greater part to those whose husbands were in receipt of a fifty per cent disability pension. The result is that the great mass of the war widows of world war No. 1 have been non-pensionable irrespective of how necessitous were their circumstances.

We made considerable progress in 1941. Section 11 of the new act is an illustration, for now a member of his majesty's forces who dies in service either in Canada or abroad leaving a widow in necessitous circumstances may, in the discretion of the board, receive a pension. It was not so in past days.

I have a memorandum here which may be interesting to hon. members. It is to the minister from the chairman of the pensions board, dated June 22, 1942. The chairman says:

Since May 1, 1941, when the select committee of the House of Commons received representations in regard to the non-pensioned widows, a total number of 59 pensions have been awarded to widows under section 21 of the Pension Act by the Canadian pension commission.

I do not know what the figures would be if I brought them up to date, but I fancy they would not be changed very greatly. In any event I am confident of their total inadequacy. Fifty-nine pensions only have been granted to those in necessitous circumstances. I know of more than that number myself, I think, personally. It is totally inadequate. I have

[Mr. Roebuck.]

given and I give great credit for the improvements in the act brought about primarily by the Minister of Pensions and National Health. He was not only legally, shall I say, formally, responsible but he was chiefly responsible. A great many consecrated absurdities were washed out of the old act and some time-honoured wrongs were abolished or mitigated. We ironed out a lot of wrinkles which should never have been in the old pensions act. Evils were removed. In some cases sores were healed, but unfortunately many of the scars remained. This is one of those scars. Had the Pension Act of 1941 been in effect since 1918 I think it is safe to say that many soldiers would have received pensions who, under the older and harsher act, were disentitled, and that some of them would have received larger pensions under the new act than they did under the old.

But here is where the scar remains. The present act will benefit veterans of the present war and those who still live from the last war. But what about those who have died? It is small comfort to the widow of to-day to be told that she must live in penury and want without government support, because of the harshness of a former law which kept the pension which was given to her husband below the fifty per cent basis or denied him a pension altogether; that she must not benefit because he did not benefit. But that is in effect the rule. Unless he was able to secure a fifty per cent benefit there is nothing now for her. It is a rule which is incapable of logical defence. Moreover, that whole fifty per cent rule is in my judgment arbitrary and illogical; and I hope that in the measure which the Minister of National Revenue has forecast he will sweep away at least that—what shall I call it?—technical defence to a claim which would otherwise be good. "National Revenue", did I say? Well, I will include the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Gibson) in some of the compliments I have been extending to the Minister of Pensions and National Health. If I have mixed the two, their characteristics of sympathy and consideration for the weak and helpless are as one. I mean that. A minister of national revenue gets mighty little sympathy. He is the one who makes us pay our taxes; and I know that the present Minister of National Revenue does it as easily, as kindly and as politely as it can be done.

But to come back to what I was saying: I do hope that the ministers will eliminate all stultifying technicalities of the kind and look these women in the face. Let us get down to realities; let us get down to facts