

*Pension Acts*

pension rates in this House on December 2 last. This is the fourth increase in the basic pension disability rate in the last seven years. The first increase amounted to 10 per cent and was granted in 1964. There was an increase of 15 per cent in 1966 and a further increase of 15 per cent in 1968. The latest increase of 10 per cent, which is effective April 1, results in an actual pension rate increase of 55 per cent over the last seven years as compared to the consumer price index rise of just over 26 per cent during the same period. The percentage increase is, of course, compounded, but when we transfer these percentages into dollars we see for example that the 100 per cent pensioner with a wife will now receive \$4,464 per annum compared to the \$2,880 he received seven years ago.

• (3:40 p.m.)

The government is proud of this new bill, designed as it is to give the disabled veteran and his family a package deal in pension benefits. The complete revamping of the Pension Act, and the increases in pensions which we are proposing, are synchronized with the social and economic conditions of today. The commitment of the Canadian people and the government to those who forged the steel of this country's character on the anvil of war will forever endure.

At the Dominion Convention of the Royal Canadian Legion in Ottawa last summer I stated that the most important improvements in veterans legislation since the end of the Second World War would be presented to this session of Parliament. I made that same promise to the Hong Kong Veterans Convention in Toronto and to the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans Convention in Vancouver. This bill is the fulfilment of that promise. I am confident that the hon. members of this House will want to give it their support.

**Mr. McCleave:** May I ask a question of the minister, Mr. Speaker? Do I understand correctly that the burden on the veteran who seeks a disability pension is that he must simply establish his case on a preponderance of the evidence rather than establish his case beyond a reasonable doubt? What is the philosophy in that regard? I am sorry; I tried to listen carefully to the minister at this point but was not able to be sure what he meant. Would the minister indicate what the philosophy is.

**Mr. Dubé:** Mr. Speaker, I was trying to say that the burden on the veteran will be much lighter than it is in criminal or civil courts. As you know, in the criminal courts the Crown must establish proof beyond any reasonable doubt. In a civil court, the plaintiff must introduce a preponderance of evidence in order to have a decision in his favour. With reference to a veteran, we propose that so long as he is able to adduce credible evidence, and that evidence is not rebutted, the case must be decided in favour of the applicant.

**Mr. Jack Marshall (Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe):** Mr. Speaker, I was quite pleased to hear the minister's comments and the announcements he made. Although I

[Mr. Dubé.]

congratulate him now, I hope he will not be too harsh with me when he hears the criticisms I have in respect of certain areas. I wish to say I was pleasantly surprised to find that the first item of business to come before the House at this part of the session deals with the second reading of Bill C-203 to amend the Pension Act and the Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act. This certainly is as it should be. When I rose on a point of order on December 18 before Christmas and asked the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) whether he would assure the House that this bill would be called on a priority basis, little did I realize I had made such an impression that the bill would be the first item called. I extend my thanks to the President of the Privy Council, to the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Dubé) and probably to the chairman of the Veterans Affairs Committee, whom I also wish to congratulate upon his appointment to the position of party whip.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Marshall:** I am sure that all others who are particularly interested in veterans affairs, both in this House and across the country, are pleased we are now making some real progress instead of dragging our feet as so obviously has been the case over the past many months. At this point in time, when the veterans of the first World War are in the age bracket of around 75 and 77, I am not sure that we who are supposed to govern can ever regain the confidence and trust of the many thousands of veterans who have looked to us, and to those who have gone before us, for a continuing appreciation of what we owe those who sacrificed so much. It will always be a wonder to me how this government can so lightly treat its responsibility to those war veterans who are incapacitated, especially at this point in time when a great many of our veterans are in the twilight years of their lives. We have dragged out the deliberations on the Woods Committee report and the production of this legislation. Over two years have passed, and we are now only at the second reading stage of the bill.

I can well remember the deliberate delays and then the tales of woe which were given as reasons for those delays. There was the five week delay last year when the chairman of the committee was absent, and yet the deputy chairman sat in his place in the House. Is it not strange that with over 20 Liberal members on that committee, in the opinion of the government not one had the ability to chair the meetings of the committee other than the appointed chairman. Then, we had the excuses about printing, translation and the wheels of justice turning slowly. In my opinion we have here more clerical, administrative, legal and translation staff than anywhere else or in any government in the world probably, aside from the U.S.A. If the reasons given were just, then we certainly must review this government's capability in this field because something is drastically wrong.

Since I have been associated with the Veterans Affairs Committee I have communicated with many veterans across this country, not only the many who have written me asking for help in respect of their applications for