

Veterans' Pensions

provided that the income factors, that is the ceiling on the income of war veterans allowance recipients, shall be increased simultaneously with, and by the same amount as, any increase in the amount of each of the old age security pension and the guaranteed income supplement provided from time to time by amendments to the Old Age Security Act, other than adjustments made under that act in relation to the consumer price index. I do not mind that latter exception because they get it under an escalation clause in the War Veterans Allowance Act. But this indicates that we will not have to stand up any more when there is an increase in the GIS and say, "Will war veterans allowance recipients get it?" It is in the act; it is automatic that the ceiling goes up. It is in two parts. First the ceiling goes up now so that they can keep the \$35 they are now receiving, and later on any increases in the GIS will result in an automatic increase in the ceiling under the War Veterans Allowance Act. When my hon. friend reads it, and if he agrees with my interpretation of it, I think he will see that it is something good and something we warmly welcome.

Pardon my repetition, but I am still thinking that this is a pretty important day in the history of veterans legislation, doing as we are something about that old 48 per cent rule. We are now doing something to improve greatly the provisions of the War Veterans Allowance Act, in particular by putting those under age 65 in the same position as those over age 65. I can think of a number of correspondents to whom I shall send copies of this day's *Hansard* with great pleasure. They were not sure the bill would contain this, but I congratulate the minister for having put it in.

● (1630)

A speech from this corner of the House on a piece of legislation would not be complete without some reference to those things which are not in the bill. I deeply regret there is nothing in it about the way in which the amount of the 100 per cent disability pension is determined.

Just as the minister has solved the problem about the GIS by making it automatic so we do not have to ask for it every year, why did he not include in this bill a provision that the amount of the 100 per cent disability pension would stay at the level of the average take-home pay of the five designated categories in the public service? We decided a few years ago that that was to be the rule or the idea. Then, having put the pension at that average in that particular year, we left its escalation to the consumer price index. In a few years it slipped behind and we had to do that again. Now it has slipped behind again. Why not make this just as automatic as the minister has now made the increase in the GIS being passed on to the veterans?

As I say, there is some question about the level of the amount. One can always ask for more. However, the point we have arrived at is not bad, considering what it was back before the days of the Woods report. This is an omission that is unfortunate and I earnestly wish it had been included.

I wish also that the legislation had included an increase in the pension rates payable to former prisoners of war. Again my friend can talk to his colleague sitting next to him; he can tell him a few things. It took a long while to get compensation for former prisoners of war. First we got it for those who were prisoners in Hong Kong, and we greatly improved that schedule so that most Hong Kong veterans are now covered between the basic 50 per cent they get and the disability rates they have received as well. I think the average Hong Kong veteran is now up to 80 per cent or 85 per cent, and quite a few of them are at 100 per cent.

It took longer still to get recognition for those who were prisoners of war in northwest Europe. We obtained that eventually. It took two bites again to get compensation for World War II prisoners of war, and then to get it for World War I prisoners of war. It is still a fact that those rates are pretty low considering the fact that the widow's pension again is determined by the veteran's rate of disability pension, or the combination of the disability pension and the prisoner of war compensation.

We used to say they needed that extra just to get up to the 48 per cent, but now, even though it will not be necessary to get up to the 48 per cent to guarantee a widow's pension, the amount of the widow's pension will still be determined by the level of the pension the veteran was drawing. Just because we have corrected the 48 per cent rule does not mean we are going to give all widows in that category the same pension widows in the upper categories get. It does affect not only the veterans themselves who were prisoners of war, it affects their widows, and I hope something may yet be done.

I do have the odd note here on my desk and I see I had as the other point I wanted to make one that I have actually dealt with already when dealing with the War Veterans Allowance Act; that is the desirability and the need to move into the concept of a guaranteed annual income for veterans.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) wants to get this going while she is still a Liberal cabinet minister. She will have trouble with some of her other colleagues in getting the money for it on a grand scale. The Minister of Veterans Affairs might get some ideas from her.

Those are the three main things not in the bill which I wish were there; the settling of the five-category provision making it automatic, improving the position of prisoners of war, and getting started with a guaranteed annual income for those who are in receipt of war veterans allowance.

Having said that about the deficiencies of the bill, I return to what I said at the start. This is an historic day. Although I deeply regret the revision under the 48 per cent rule is going to take six and a half years to phase in, I welcome the fact that we are making this change and the fact that we are improving the position under the War Veterans Allowance Act. I am glad the minister was able to come back from the hospital and be with us today for this important and historic piece of legislation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!