

Interim Supply

to lodge somewhere in the minds of enough Canadians to make them realize that they simply cannot go on drifting any longer. Something simply must be done, and the encouragement of the beet sugar industry is obviously one of the things which ought to be done. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Harkness: Mr. Chairman, I wish to deal with the increases in the veterans pensions and the war veterans allowances which are provided in the further supplementary estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1958.

We have already had some considerable mention of the general method of bringing in the increases in regard to old age pensions, veterans increases, and so forth. I think the manner of doing this is extremely unsatisfactory, and that is particularly so in the case of increases in veterans pensions and war veterans allowances. In every previous case in which there has been an increase in those veterans benefits the veterans affairs committee has been called together. The government has proposed its increase, generally has given a bill second reading and then referred it to the veterans affairs committee, where a full discussion of the proposals and a full investigation into all of the needs of the situation took place. I think that type of procedure is particularly necessary as far as dealing fairly with our veterans is concerned.

When you have a committee of that kind the veterans organizations are able to make representations and put the case of the veterans before the members of the committee, and thus before the House of Commons and the government. At every one of those committee meetings where proposed increases were brought forward, the Legion, the army, navy and air force veterans, the blind veterans association and numerous other veterans associations appeared to make representations and, as a result of the representations made, as a result of the discussions in that committee, on various occasions the legislation was considerably improved.

The case that comes to my mind most particularly is a proposal that was made by the government in 1947 for an increase in veterans pensions. The then prime minister, Right Hon. Mr. King, rose in the house and said it was proposed to increase pensions by 10 per cent; I think that was the figure mentioned at the beginning. Immediately there was a great outcry that this was not nearly enough. Subsequently Mr. King rose in the house and said the government had decided to increase the pensions by 15 per cent.

[Mr. Blackmore.]

A bill was brought in on that basis and referred to the veterans affairs committee. A long discussion took place there. The committee eventually recommended that the increase should be 25 per cent. That was accepted by the government, and an increase of 25 per cent was given. That is an outstanding example of the value of referring matters of this sort to the veterans affairs committee, and of the necessity of doing so if the matter is to be gone into in anything like a reasonable way and the veterans are to get anything like justice. It is one o'clock, Mr. Chairman.

At one o'clock the committee took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The committee resumed at 2.30 p.m.

Mr. Harkness: Mr. Chairman, before the luncheon adjournment I had been speaking of the extremely unsatisfactory way in which the increases in war veterans allowances and veterans pensions had been handled at this session, and of the fact that we are now asked to vote a portion of the supplementary estimates. I pointed out in particular that matters relating to veterans affairs had always been handled through the veterans affairs committee, and the fact that this had not been done this year and the committee had not been convened meant that the veterans organizations had no opportunity to present the veteran's case.

I can see no reason why the matter could not have been handled in the regular manner this session. No doubt the government knew some considerable time ago that these increases were going to be put into effect; therefore there was no reason why they could not have brought in the increases in the form of an amendment to the War Veterans Allowance Act and then referred the matter to the veterans affairs committee.

The fact that this was not done points up the necessity for a standing committee on veterans affairs, something for which all parties in the opposition have argued for a number of years. We have repeatedly called upon the government every year for some considerable time past to make this a standing committee of the house rather than leaving it as a special or select committee which is convened only when the government feels like convening it. The fact that the special veterans affairs committee was not called to meet this year and that these increases were not submitted to it makes it appear that the government deliberately avoided having the committee meet.