

*Old Age Pensions*

Mr. MANION: Does my hon. friend forget that all day the members on this side of the House have taken the attitude that this whole thing should be a federal matter? The minister was taking the opposite position, but now he is defending the provinces.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): No, you cannot put it in that way. The provinces and the Dominion should assume their own responsibilities. I am not suggesting that we should adopt my hon. friend's amendment, placing the full responsibility on the Dominion government, in a measure of this kind, but I am willing to go any length my hon. friend will go to amend the pension act to take care of the returned soldier.

Mr. BENNETT: I think the minister has not apprehended the point. If to-day a citizen in Calgary or Edmonton who served in the war is unable to support himself, he is a charge upon the municipality and not the Dominion.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): I say he should not be.

Mr. BENNETT: And the Dominion has declined always to contribute to the municipality for the purpose of his support.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): Is my hon. friend not wrong in that statement so far as the returned soldier is concerned?

Mr. McGIBBON: No.

Mr. BENNETT: The minister is talking about war disability as distinguished from indigence. If a man of forty who went to the war is unable to support himself and his family, the municipality has to support him.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): Where it was demonstrated that the indigent was a returned soldier, the full payment for relief was given by the Dominion.

Mr. CLARKE: Under what legislation?

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): Up until a year ago.

Mr. CLARK: No.

Mr. McGIBBON: Every medical man in this country knows, as I fancy every member of parliament does, that there are tens of thousands of ex-soldiers in this country who are incapacitated and unable to make a living, and who have not been able to attach that incapacity to the federal government and get a pension. In order to get a pension you have to attach yourself to a physical disability. Many men in this country are like

[Mr. C. A. Stewart.]

a battery which has been discharged and cannot be recharged. They are physically and mentally incapable of making a living; they are a charge upon the municipality and you cannot fasten that responsibility upon the pension board. I have tried it, every member of this House probably has tried it, certainly every medical man has tried it. That is the case we are pleading to-night, the case of the man who cannot attach his disability to his war service in such a degree as to get a pension, and yet he is a charge upon the state. Those cases are existing in thousands. They were physically fit when they went to the war, but to-day they are physically unfit. The contention of the hon. member for Fort William (Mr. Manion) is perfectly correct: those men should have consideration not only in this but in every other legislation of a similar character.

Mr. ROSS (Moose Jaw): Mr. Chairman, I agree with some of the members on the other side that there are a great many returned men in this country who should have pensions. They may not be able to show that their disability is connected with the war, nevertheless it is due to the terrible trials they went through at the front. As a result their systems have become weakened and in some cases they have since contracted disease which had they been in a normal condition of health they would not have been subject to. Those men to-day are a charge upon the state, but I cannot see that putting the age limit at 65 in this bill will help them very much, because it will be twenty years before many of them can take advantage of it.

Mr. MANION: This government would not have anything to worry about then.

Mr. ROSS (Moose Jaw): I think legislation should be enacted whereby any returned man who is unable to earn a living, whether due to his war service or not, should be looked after by the Dominion government.

Mr. CLARK: Mr. Chairman, I would draw the attention of the government to remarks that were made in this House nearly five years ago when this very problem was brought to the attention of the government. I well remember that the minister in charge of pensions at that time, the Hon. Dr. Beland, made the same statement that the present minister and several of his colleagues have made this evening, namely, that this is a federal responsibility which comes under the soldier legislation, the Pensions Act, and that if that act is not broad enough to take care of these cases it should be amended. I am in full agreement with that. But I ask, why,