

War Veterans' Allowance Act

the hon. member for Rosthern (Mr. Tucker) during the course of the resolution debate stated that this War Veterans' Allowance Act was a good act. It does the job, in most respects, that it was intended to do. I was, therefore, a little surprised this afternoon when the hon. member unlimbered a rather withering attack across the barrier with regard to the amendments that are being proposed. Others have answered the arguments for me, but I think that I should just repeat the points that have been made. I should say to the hon. member for Rosthern that it is quite impossible, as I think he will see, to rectify all the mistakes and the shortcomings of the previous administration in one short month. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, we have not been sitting here one month, and we have realized that there were shortcomings in the act. There are minor points of irritation, and I have made reference to them before.

I believe the purpose of the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Brooks) at this time is to deal in a most rapid and effective way with the shortcomings and with these oversights that have existed hitherto in the act. I should like to say that I agree 100 per cent with the sentiments that have been expressed concerning the capacity and ability of the Minister of Veterans Affairs. He has served in this house for 22 years. He has established a reputation as one who has a kindly disposition towards the problems of veterans in this country. It is not only a kindly disposition, but it is a disposition that is backed by an abundant knowledge of their personal needs. I assure the hon. member for Rosthern that in due course there will be the opportunity, for example, that he and others have expressed to have a more comprehensive review of the veterans charter as it exists at the present time.

Mr. Tucker: We are listening carefully to these promises, too.

Mr. Dinsdale: Yes. I imagine, knowing the Minister of Veterans Affairs and knowing his wide background of experience, one of the reasons why he hesitated in going too far into controversial matters at this time was that he would not quite know what tactics the members of the official opposition would take. I know from my experience in these committees that we have tried to deal with the topics that have been mentioned by the hon. member for Rosthern as having been neglected by the government, but he has taken a diametrically opposite viewpoint to that which he took here this afternoon. It is not necessary to labour this point. As I have said, I am glad to see that the majority

of members have agreed that the minister in bringing forward these proposals is taking a long step forward in meeting the changing needs of the veterans who are served by the War Veterans' Allowance Act.

There are just one or two specific matters with which perhaps I should deal at this time. Several members referred to the discrepancy of the provision in the act concerning allowable property holdings. The bill is raising the allowable holdings from \$6,000 to \$8,000. Some reference has been made to the fact that this is less than the \$9,000 recommended by the Canadian Legion. I believe that recommendation was put forward in their presentation of 1955. I understand that the \$9,000 was based on a formula derived from the fair market value. I might point out to the members who raised this particular point that the present figure has been derived from a different formula, not the fair market value but rather the assessed value or the equity holding of the veteran in the property. Actually, under those terms, the \$8,000 figure is even more generous than the one requested by the Legion in 1955.

Reference has been made to the restrictive nature of the ceiling. One of the fundamental purposes of the amendment is to try to meet the changing circumstances that have resulted from the rising cost of living and I think actually, under the existing situation and in the light of the representations of the veterans organizations, the increase in the ceilings will go a long way towards resolving the problem faced by veterans in this regard.

I would like to point out further that to raise the present ceiling still higher would not, generally speaking, benefit those who have no other income and cannot supplement their allowance from casual earnings. The recipients who are in receipt of a small pension or superannuation would benefit to a certain extent but in the main an additional raising of the ceiling would only result in an additional increment to those who are able to supplement their allowance and who do represent the great majority. To use this method to try to help those who cannot supplement their allowance would also be very costly and the great bulk of the moneys thus spent would really assist the less needy recipients.

I believe the hon. member for Burnaby-Richmond (Mr. Irwin) made the point that the maximum allowance for a single veteran would be \$840—I think I am right in saying that. Now there is an assistance fund allowed under the act which makes provision for an allowance up to the maximum of the ceiling, that is to say \$1,080, to indigent veterans who have no other source of income. Furthermore the same hon. gentleman referred to