

Veterans Benefit Act

set up for this session; we have asked, and I think the fact that we are setting up another committee this year only adds more strength to the argument we have used in the past, that there should be a permanent veterans affairs committee set up here in this House of Commons. I do not know just how many committees we have had since the first veterans committee sat, but I am satisfied it must be in the neighbourhood of 17 or 18, and on the average we must have had a veterans committee every second year.

It is not surprising that veterans committees are necessary and veterans legislation has to be changed so often, because, when we consider that the veterans of the first world war are now old men, and that their mode of living and the conditions under which they live have changed, and when we consider that we live in a period of cold war and have garrisons in Germany and other parts of the world, it must be evident that legislation must be enacted in order to deal with these changing circumstances. Also, we had recently a hot war in Korea to which Bill 101 has direct reference as regards veterans. In addition to these factors there is the increase in the cost of living, unemployment and other matters which concern veterans and lend emphasis to the necessity for the setting up of a permanent veterans committee in this house.

I do not wish to anticipate the legislation which will be brought before this committee, but the minister has mentioned the War Veterans Allowance Act. If any act in the whole veterans charter requires amendment it is the War Veterans Allowance Act, and I am pleased the minister has suggested that possibly that act will be amended when it comes before this committee. Am I correct?

Mr. Lapointe: I am sorry to have to correct my hon. friend. I do not wish to say it will not be amended, but I did not say what he has suggested. What I said was that this bill made no reference to the War Veterans Allowance Act because the amendments in 1952 made such provisions.

Mr. Brooks: The minister, then, did not suggest that the War Veterans Allowance Act would be amended, but I suggest to him that it is one of the acts that should be amended and I hope it will be brought before this veterans committee for amendment when the committee is set up. I will not go into the reasons why I believe it should be amended.

In addition to the other things I have mentioned, veterans housing and the Canadian Legion brief should be considered by the veterans committee.

While this veterans committee is being contemplated I would also like to bring to the minister's attention the fact that we have had great difficulty in previous veterans committees, over our terms of reference. They have always been too narrow and we have always felt circumscribed when dealing with veterans affairs in committee, and we have never felt we could do justice to the matters which were brought before the committee for attention. I would suggest to the minister that the terms of reference of this committee, if and when it is set up, and I am satisfied it will be if the minister says so, should be made broad enough to include the outstanding problems of veterans at the present time.

I, Mr. Speaker, like some other hon. members, had prepared considerable material which I intended to use in discussing Bill No. 101, but I think it would only be a waste of time to discuss these matters now when they can be more thoroughly discussed in the veterans committee. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I have nothing further to say at the present time.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, my first words will be to express pleasure at the announcement made by the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Lapointe) to the effect that the special committee on veterans affairs is to be established.

I regret that some of my colleagues, who might be chosen as members of that committee, do not happen to be here in the chamber at this particular moment. I know I speak for them and for all of us in this group when I say we are glad that at last this decision has been made. I may say that, from the way in which the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Lapointe) answered the question put to him only a day or two ago by the hon. member for Acadia (Mr. Quelch), I dared to hope that perhaps the softening up process was having its effect and that we would get such a committee at this session.

I see a little procedural problem as to how you will handle the matter, Mr. Speaker, if second reading is concluded tonight and the Minister of Veterans Affairs then wishes to ask that the bill be referred to a committee that has not yet been appointed. But I am sure that, if anything that is proper can be proposed to deal with that situation, the house will certainly give its consent. The desirability of having this committee is clear and the desirability of referring to that committee this and other legislation like it is beyond question.

Like others, we regret that this bill is another one of these omnibus measures that sets out to amend the sections of a number of different statutes. This time the number