

Veterans' Pensions

come up with and we must get it this afternoon. But surely this provision is so unfair that the Committee of the Whole will want to support my amendment to bring it into effect for all widows no later than October 1 of this year. As one who has been concerned about a better deal for widows of veterans for a long time, a concern I know I am sharing with many people within the sound of my voice, I welcome this historic day.

● (1620)

Now I turn to the question of the War Veterans Allowance Act.

Here again I think this is an historic day. The minister referred to this being its golden anniversary, but I would like to put it in its proper context. The War Veterans Allowance Act was brought in 50 years ago at a time when the old age pension act, the one which was passed in 1926 and came into effect in 1927, was in effect.

Mr. Parent: Were you here then?

Mr. Knowles: No, but I knew about it; I was aware of it at the time. That pension was \$20 a month at age 70 with a means test. I will not tell the whole story of the fight that we had to get that improved, but I can tell the House what it was like. The War Veterans Allowance Act was drafted in that context. It too was a means test pension, and the gist or the heart of it was that it was to be something which would provide for veterans who could not prove disabilities under the Pension Act something a little better than was available to the civilian population. So the amount was a little more than \$20 a month, and it was available slightly under the age of the old age pension. I think it was age 60 right at the start and the means test was a little less severe.

But for the civilian population we have moved on and greatly increased the amount. We removed the means test completely from the basic amount of that pension and we have lowered the eligible age from 70 down to 65. Yet for the war veterans allowance its essentials are still much as they were in 1930. It is a means test pension. I know that some like to call it "income tested", but when what one gets is cut short because of something else one has, it does not matter what it is called, it is tough to take.

I think it is hard to argue today whether the war veterans allowance or the burnt-out pension is something better for veterans who cannot prove their disabilities than is the case for the civilian population, which was the *raison d'être* of the War Veterans Allowance Act. I am not just using this phrase because it came out of the convention in Winnipeg last weekend, but we should be moving in the direction of a guaranteed annual income. I know of no better place to start with that concept than with our veterans.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles: I think that is what should be taking the place of the War Veterans Allowance Act, or that that is what should be coming out of this in-depth review which the minis-

ter said has been going on in his department for the last two or three years.

That is my general comment about the War Veterans Allowance Act. I do not suppose anyone has criticized it, particularly its means test provisions, over the years more than I. But at the same time I admit it has been a welcome piece of legislation. The burnt-out pension, which it is popularly called—and many veterans who receive it just call it their pension—means a great deal to them. It has solved many a family situation. Also it is good that the day came when we provided a widow's allowance under the War Veterans Allowance Act as a matter of legislation.

A moment ago I referred to the questions on behalf of the widows of World War I which I asked of the late Right Hon. Ian Mackenzie back in the early 1940s. Actually the questions I put then were when we were going to make these grants being given to such widows a matter of statute instead of being at the grace of the government with a supplementary estimate every year. It is one of the things we won rather early, to put widows under the War Veterans Allowance Act. It has been good legislation, but it was good compared to what was available to the civilian population when it was brought in. In view of what we have done for the civilian population now, we should be doing better. Again I say to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and to all those people in the gallery whose presence I have already noted and welcomed, get to work on a guaranteed annual income for our veterans.

With respect to the changes in this bill dealing with the war veterans allowance, I am afraid at this point I must differ with the hon. member for Victoria. He found it to be something of which he was critical. I think it is good. What the bill is proposing is that payments be made to veterans in receipt of the allowance who are under age 65 at so much a month and it goes up a little bit every year. There again, why stage it? Some of these veterans will not live long enough to get the full amount, so why stage it?

I was going to tell the minister to talk to his colleague sitting beside him, but he is leaving the chamber. His colleague knows how to get billions of dollars out of that cabinet. The Minister of Veterans Affairs needs to get only a few million. I say that veterans are entitled to the increase they will get under the War Veterans Allowance Act immediately instead of its being staged in. But I say to the hon. member for Victoria that when it is staged in full, the veterans below age 65 will be getting the same amount as those above age 65.

I congratulate the hon. member for Victoria on being critical and suspicious about these people over there. He thought he saw a loss to the veterans because, while the under 65 were getting this increase, the over 65 were to have their GIS counted as income for the purpose of the War Veterans Allowance Act instead of its being exempt income. But what he must note is that this bill raises the ceiling on the income that such war veterans allowance recipients can have, so that they will keep in full the extra \$35 they are now getting.

Then the bill goes a further step which I welcome most warmly. Under section 19.5 on page 29 of the bill, it is