

Pension Acts

pensions always lagged behind. Eventually they were adjusted, but never quite up to the equivalent of the earnings of an unskilled labourer. Adjustments were made retroactively, so to speak, so that our veterans' position always fell behind that of the unskilled labourer. As a result, the differences between the veteran's pension and the wage of an unskilled labourer were cumulative. This was pointed out very forcibly in a submission made to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the cabinet entitled, "the Crisis in Veterans' Pensions and Allowances". It was made by the national veterans' associations of Canada. I will not list them. There are 11 or 12 of them. The brief reads in part as follows. I quote from page 3:

● (8:50 p.m.)

A history of pension increases shows that in 1920 the amount provided under the Pension Act was \$900 a year. This was the equivalent of the amount paid to the cleaner and helper in the federal civil service. No further increase was granted until 1948, when the basic rate of pension became \$1,128. Subsequent increases resulted in maximum pension as follows:

The pension went up to \$1,500, then to \$1,800, to \$2,160, to \$2,400, to \$2,760, and to \$3,180. These would be 100 per cent pensions. I point out that very few veterans, of course, qualify for a 100 per cent pension. Therefore, we should not assume that every veteran who receives a pension gets anything like this amount per annum. The brief goes on to say:

It is understood that the cleaning serviceman (formerly cleaner and helper) is no longer rated as a standard classification and has become subjected to regional fluctuations. It is still possible, however, to isolate and identify a category of male untrained worker in the public service of Canada. In this respect, our survey indicates that the average wage for such category is approximately \$4,500 per annum.

Using this category as a replacement for the cleaner and helper, the gap between the original basis of war disability pension and the equivalent being earned by unskilled labour in the federal civil service is now approximately \$1,300 per annum.

That is one measure, Mr. Speaker, of the cumulative effect of lags in the adjustments to the pension paid to our veterans. Of course, as time passes it is understandable that the memories of situations which existed in World War I and World War II should fade. Those memories have become less vivid in the minds of the public and, therefore, in the minds of the electors; and governments perhaps tend to be less sensitive about the need of veterans as time goes by. A new generation is growing up which has no memories of the crises through which our nation has passed.

A number of myths about veterans are held by some people, and especially the young. They assume that practically every veteran receives a pension. Although I do not have up-to-date statistics, figures of a little over one year ago indicate that of the 961,000 veterans of world War I and World War II who were then living, only 169,000 were in receipt of disability pension. Therefore, less than one in five received any pension. The figures include dependants, widows, and so on. So far as war veterans allowance is concerned, only 85,000 out of one million veterans receive war veterans allowance. That is less than one veteran in 11.

[Mr. MacLean.]

I want to disabuse the minds of those who think that all veterans receive pension whether they need them or not. According to the history of the administration of pensions, they have been very restricted. It is rare indeed for a veteran to get any pension or benefit to which he is not entitled. On the other hand, I am certain that thousands of veterans receive no pension because of the difficulty of establishing technically their entitlement to pension.

Mr. McIntosh: Shame.

Mr. MacLean: This process has been going on over the years. It is 25 years since World War II ended, but I am sure every member of the House receives correspondence from veterans who are still trying to establish their entitlement to pension. Another view that many people hold erroneously about veterans pensions is this. Many people say, "The Veterans' Land Act administration was set up to help us deal with veterans. We settled them in rural areas of the country, and therefore most veterans live in little establishments that were subsidized by the government shortly after the war." People think that the cost of living of the veteran is not very high and that increases in the cost of living, and the rate of inflation, do not affect him much. Nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. Sixty five per cent of our veterans live in urban areas. There are 154,000 of them living in Toronto, and 100,000 in Montreal. As a result, they feel the full effects of increases in the cost of living.

I wish to make a few remarks specifically about Bill C-203. I congratulate the minister, the Standing Committee of Veterans Affairs, the officials of the department and the veterans organizations which appeared before the Woods commission and the House committee. Their actions and arguments resulted in these improvements to the Pension Act. I am pleased that special recognition has been given to veterans who served in Hong Kong and were prisoners of the Japanese. I think that, is a good move. I think it is also excellent that special allowances are to be given to 100 per cent pensioners who have exceptional disabilities.

The bill, however, deals chiefly with the administration of the Pension Act. I think that the changes in the bill are improvements in most cases. However, even the improvements will tend to dislocate the administration of veterans pensions. This detrimental effect will be felt temporarily, until those who administer the act become completely conversant with and efficient in its administration. I think the formation of the bureau of pension advocates outside the department will be beneficial. The same applies to the pension review board. The redefinition of the benefit of doubt is long overdue; however, I am still skeptical whether the improvement has gone far enough. I am sure many veterans still suffer because they were not given the benefit of the doubt in the sense that Parliament intended when the veterans legislation was first introduced.

Also, there are omissions from the bill. It is not logical to say that a widow should not qualify for a pension if