

Pension Act and Other Acts

I know that sections of the War Veterans Allowance Act impose a means test, and I believe that if the Minister of Finance and his colleague, the Minister of Veterans Affairs really had the interest of the war veteran at heart they would have done something with section 6 of that act. Section 6 defines exempt income, and it should include a provision covering these cases. What is even worse is that section 8 of the act, which establishes values of personal property in excess of \$1,250 where the veteran and his spouse own personal property of value in excess of \$2,500, is ignored. There is also the requirement that property shall not exceed \$10,000 in value. That is based upon 1965 values, Mr. Speaker, when the cost of living index stood at 107.4. The cost of living index in April, 1972, stood at 138.2, an increase of 30.8 points, or some 27 per cent. Yet those figures still remain on the statute book and constitute a bar.

• (1630)

I hope the minister will make a reply to the points that we have raised from this side of the House. Certain hesitant steps have been taken, but now that the act is open for review we should tackle elimination of the ridiculous rule of residence in Canada for one year prior to qualification. I invite the minister between now and election day, when he must vacate office, to acquaint himself with the situation of people qualified for war veterans allowance and who live in the United Kingdom or elsewhere outside of Canada. The representations on this point must make up a foot high.

I have tried to persuade the minister's predecessors on this point, but all the time we get the same assertion to the effect that there are administrative difficulties involved. That is utter nonsense, Mr. Speaker. Where there is a will there is a way, but unfortunately the government has not shown a will to deal with this matter. The Canadian Veterans Association of the United Kingdom, Colonel Victor Jones, and many others have presented brief after brief on this point. But the point is not being dealt with in this bill. There are great gaps in the amendments which are being presented. As I say, some hesitant steps are being taken. This would be a welcome opportunity to make the necessary changes.

The bill need not be limited to the budgetary proposals of the Minister of Finance. I certainly hope we can get some satisfactory answers from the minister to the representations made by hon. members in this debate. I also hope that the legislation will not remain long in committee because, as has been pointed out, there is no automatic \$15 or \$30 being added to cheques in this case. Individual calculations must be made. If the officials take as long to make these calculations as they do to make public service superannuation calculations, many a veteran will have passed on to his reward before he gets an increased cheque. However, I commend the legislation to hon. members, notwithstanding the many gaps in it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roland Godin (Portneuf): Mr. Speaker, I feel it is my duty to seize the opportunity afforded by the consideration of Bill C-208 to make known my views concerning the situation in which veterans are placed at present.

This bill provides for a much-needed and long-awaited increase in allowances. I have strong reservations, however, as to the final result of such measure.

Obviously, wide propaganda is going to be given to the implementation of this bill. This is nothing new, as the propaganda given to government measures is always wide enough to demonstrate the advantages of measures taken at several levels—whether they are provincial or federal measures, they are always given enough propaganda so that people expect something extraordinary.

At present, for instance, a number of rural Canadians are led to believe that the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation assumes a good share of the rents of urban dwellers, who can easily benefit from the advantages offered by this organization, while in fact the contrary is true, since the number of families in this country which receive those allowances designed to assist them in paying their rents is minimal compared with the number of those who have to pay a fairly high rent to that same organization.

If we go back a few years, in the field of agriculture, for instance, because of wide propaganda given to settlers, to all the people who were new to agriculture, veteran farmers used to believe that they were being forsaken and that settlers had a much easier life since they could obtain grants right, left and center whenever they applied for them. That was a most erroneous concept of the life of settlers, since there was no relation whatsoever between the allowances they actually received and those which had been promised to them on the eve of an election.

In other words, governments promise a lot and give very little in relation to existing needs and to efforts made.

Today, Mr. Speaker, this bill proposes an increase of 3½ per cent, and this is just fantastic. It is one step forward. It is better than nothing. In my opinion, it is time, now more than ever, to take this opportunity to congratulate the minister who is at present piloting this bill.

However, since I have known for many years the veterans who live in the Portneuf riding, which I am pleased to represent, I can say that the measure before us does not fully meet their present needs. And if we refer to the increase in the cost of living, to the dollar devaluation, we can see that the new benefits fall far from the real needs of veterans, their widows or their children.

Mr. Speaker, I shall indulge, at this stage, and for my colleagues' information, in reading the exchange of correspondence about one case. This is a letter which was addressed to the former Minister of Veterans' Affairs (Mr. Dubé) on January 26, 1971. I quote:

The above-mentioned person, who is a veteran's widow, has let me know that she receives only \$145 per month, as a pension.

Considering that this lady is paralyzed in one arm, and should therefore get a maid's help;

Considering that her bad health requires expensive drugs;

Considering that the pension of Pierre Laporte's widow was established in relation to the cost of living, would you be so kind as to review the case of this Canadian woman, who suffers unfair hardships, if one considers the amount of goods and services that are offered in this country.

Thank you for your kind co-operation.

Sincerely yours