

Privilege—Mr. Stanley Knowles

VETERANS AFFAIRS

REQUEST THAT BASIC RATE OF WAR DISABILITY PENSION BE RECONSIDERED

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a question to the Minister of Veterans Affairs. In view of the increasing concern on the part of veterans across Canada over the refusal of the government to restore the basic rate of the war disability pension to the average take-home pay of the five categories of public servants designated in 1973, has the minister resubmitted this matter to the cabinet, asking for a reversal of the negative decision which he announced a couple of months ago?

Hon. Daniel J. MacDonald (Minister of Veterans Affairs): No, Mr. Speaker, I have not resubmitted this question, but I would like to remind the House that on January 1 there was an increase of 7.2 per cent, in disability pensions across this country. As I stated previously, when the government sees things in a different light, I will bring this matter back to it.

Mr. McGrath: You will have a long wait.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that the 7.2 per cent cost of living increase granted by legislation this month does not restore the basic rate to the level agreed upon in 1973, will the minister reconsider the position he is taking today? While he is pursuing that, will he also consider pressing for action on behalf of widows where the veteran's pension was less than 48 per cent, resulting in no pension for such widows, and also on behalf of the fewer than 200 veterans of World War I who were prisoners of war in that war but who do not receive the compensation provided by parliament?

Mr. MacDonald (Cardigan): Mr. Speaker, the answer to all those questions is yes. We have under consideration the widows referred to. I also expect to bring to the House some news about veterans of the First World War. This will be brought to the attention of the House at a later date.

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PRIVILEGE

MR. KNOWLES (WINNIPEG NORTH CENTRE)—CP AIR EXECUTIVE SERVICE BOOKING ARRANGEMENTS

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege of which I have given Your Honour the appropriate notice under Standing Order 17(2).

A couple of days ago most members of this House received a letter from CP Air dated January 13. Actually, it reached me only a couple of days ago and it was only yesterday afternoon that I was able to get the background information that leads me to believe that a question of privilege is involved.

As I say, this letter was written on the letterhead of a private corporation, CP Air, and was addressed to members of parliament. The letter expresses the desire of that company to

[Mr. Speaker.]

provide us with service, and so on. It solicits our patronage. Obviously, there is nothing wrong with that, but in the letter we are told that there are two telephone numbers we can dial to get this special service. The significance of these two telephone numbers is that they are not ordinary private company seven-digit numbers; they are five-digit numbers. In other words, they are part of the government telephone service.

There is no comparable number for Air Canada. In the course of my inquiries I was told that a number had been established for Air Canada, but when I called that number the answer was "Central Travel Service" which, of course, is an agency of the government. When I called one of the two numbers listed in this letter the answer was a very pleasant "CP Air Executive Service".

Mr. Gillies: What is the number?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, you will be wondering when I am going to get to the point of this being a matter of parliamentary privilege. My information is that this letter was sent to a limited number of persons. It was sent to most if not all members of parliament, although I have not yet ascertained whether any French-speaking members of the House received a letter in French. The letter was also sent to members of the other place. Apart from the members of these two Houses it was sent only to deputy ministers and possibly assistant deputy ministers; however, so far as I can ascertain, only to deputy ministers.

In other words, we, the 260-odd members of this House, are the majority of those to whom this letter was addressed. My point is that this puts us as members of this House in an awkward situation, if we accept this arrangement, whereby we are party to a scheme or arrangement which involves a government service being used, or abused, by a private company.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Nonsense.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): My hon. friend says "nonsense". I do not know that any of the hotels of Ottawa, the restaurants or the taxi cab companies which would like to have our business, have been given the privilege of special government numbers, yet CP Air seems to have been given, or to have obtained this privilege.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order. I wonder if I might be permitted to allow the hon. member to conclude his argument.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): My checking has produced the information that either the Department of Supply and Services or the Department of Communications was responsible for assigning a special number as part of Central Travel Service arrangements. I am told it was clearly understood that this was to provide a service for members and was not to be used as an advertising gimmick by a private company.