

bring them up to the ceiling set in that act, the way that act reads, what they get as prisoners of war compensation will come off their war veterans allowance. This means that though they may feel it is better to have something that is recognition rather than a form of welfare, we should be taking another look at the means test provisions in the War Veterans Allowance Act.

The other two things I want to say have been said very effectively by my friend and colleague, the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe, but he and I, as well as others, feel that we cannot fail to emphasize these points every time there is an opportunity to do so. The question of the widow in the case where the veteran's pension was less than 48 per cent is not foreign to the whole subject matter that is before us because it was dealt with in the Hermann report and it was part of the recommendation that the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs made to the House. The hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe has read portions of that recommendation.

I still feel, as do many people in this country, that it is unthinkable that a woman who was married to a veteran on a 48 per cent pension can get the full widow's pension if her husband dies, but another woman married to a veteran on a 47 per cent pension gets nothing after the veteran dies. Surely the idea of at least a pro rata pension, which is what our recommendation called for, must be considered. We shall deal with this issue when we get to committee on the annual report of the department and we shall deal with it when we have the estimates before the committee, for this issue simply cannot be forgotten. As I say, that is part of the whole matter that was raised in the Hermann report.

The other issue raised by my friend from Newfoundland is still with us very strongly, namely, that the understanding of 1973 has, in our view, not been carried forward in that the basic rate of the war disability pension has not been retained at the level of the average take home pay of the five categories in the public service which were designated that year. This too we can deal with when we are in committee on the various items that have been referred to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

I can say to you, sir, and to the minister and the government, that these issues cannot be side-tracked. There are still other matters that relate to veterans. Once we have dealt with World War I prisoners of war, there are two other main issues, the ones we are talking about this afternoon, namely the position of the widow whose veteran husband's pension was below 48 per cent, and the basic rate of the war disability pension itself. There is no doubt in my friend's mind or mine where the minister's heart is with respect to this. We are satisfied that he is with us and we sympathize with him because of the trouble he has with his tight-fisted colleagues in the cabinet. I hope he looks upon our keeping at him on these issues as being a case of supporting him in what must be done for the veterans of this country.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are these items of unfinished business. We shall keep at them. But so far as Bill C-27 is

concerned, we welcome it and we are prepared to see it passed through all stages this afternoon.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Before recognizing the hon. member for Richmond (Mr. Beaudoin) is it agreed that, because of the disposition of the House to proceed through all stages of the bill this afternoon, I do not see the clock until we have adopted the bill?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Léonel Beaudoin (Richmond): Mr. Speaker, first I want to congratulate the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) for this bill designed to improve the lot of members of the Armed Forces who were prisoners of war during the first world war and others who were later evaders in enemy or enemy occupied territory.

Of course, this bill will affect only about 300 people, which is not very many. However, Mr. Speaker, I hasten to add that we members of the Social Credit Party of Canada warmly welcome the provisions of this bill. There is no doubt that ex-prisoners of war deserve gratitude and respect from people all over the country. In light of the gradual erosion of the real value of the benefits now paid by the federal government to this category of citizens, the passing of this measure will undoubtedly help them. Mr. Speaker, we cannot ignore the needs of veterans who just like us have to face increases in the cost of living and all kinds of expenses. I sincerely think that it is our duty to ensure that this bill which has just been introduced by the Minister of Veterans Affairs is passed this afternoon as quickly as possible.

I am all the more aware that it has become urgent to welcome the representations made by these ex-prisoners of war that they have been very badly treated and that they were victims of atrocities. As stated by the minister in his speech, these few hundreds of prisoners of war of the first world war who are 82 on the average have probably suffered from malnutrition and deprivation as much as if not more than those of the second world war. In fact, do the effects of such imprisonment not stay with you for the rest of your life? These prisoners of war, who for the most part were volunteers, had to leave their home to fight. They accepted to run all sorts of risks and even to die if necessary to defend their country. In any case, the minister proved this afternoon that the government has considered their problem and that they are entitled to be heard and even to get what they have been seeking for a long time.

Before closing, I would like to urge the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) to reconsider his decision of October 26 last, namely that the federal government would not recommend to Parliament that the basic rate of disability pensions be increased for all veterans unable to work.

In June 1973, the House passed a bill which aimed at amending the legislation concerning veterans' pensions. Under this bill, the federal government promised that disability pensions for veterans would achieve parity with the wages earned