

provinces have no responsibility in regard to the returned soldier. I think it is not only a Dominion responsibility but a provincial, a municipal and a personal responsibility. I do not admit at all that these pious platitudes which we hear that we should treat the soldier the best we can is going to do the soldier any good, whereas a clause in this bill giving the right to the returned soldiers to have a pension at the age of sixty-five, when many of them are old men long before that, due to the war, would be of some benefit to them. I submit once more that the provinces should be very happy to take the attitude that they should help returned soldiers who require help. It would apply only to those who needed help, and probably only a small number would come under it. The argument that we should place legislation on the statute book to look after these returned soldiers seems to me to be a sound one. But we have not that legislation on the statute book, and thousands of returned soldiers in this country are incapacitated from earning their living because of services at the front, so that I look upon it as the duty of the government presenting this bill to make it apply to returned soldiers with some better advantage than it is applied to the ordinary working-man. I hope the government seriously consider this matter. The position taken by my good friend the Minister of Public Works every time anybody offers suggestions about the bill, that we are hindering the bill and going to do harm is, with all due respect, not well taken—I was going to say ridiculous, but I do not wish to be disrespectful. The different bills are brought into this House and submitted to hon. members in order that they may offer suggestions and propose amendments. The Minister of Health took three-quarters of an hour in presenting his argument, and the gist of his whole speech was that we should accept the principle of the bill. Well, we accepted it on the second reading, but I think we should endeavour to look after our returned soldiers a little better than we look after the men who did not go to the front, and I do not think the House would be doing any injury to the provinces or to the people generally by giving the returned soldier a little better benefit than we are giving the ordinary citizen.

Miss MACPHAIL: Why place the age at sixty-five? Many men much younger than that are totally or almost totally incapacitated on account of the war, and they are not covered by the provisions of the act. Why should we make the age sixty-five? I would be willing to include all soldiers who are unable to make a living under the pension act, no matter what their age may be.

Mr. MANION: I desire to express my gratitude to the hon. member for Southeast Grey for her supporting of my contention, and I will go as far as she will in that direction. But seeing how hard it is to get an acceptance of my suggestion as to sixty-five years, how much more trouble would I have if I proposed that the age should be placed at sixty? I am suggesting that sixty-five shall be the age. If the hon. member for Southeast Grey can convince the minister to go lower than sixty-five I will back her up to the last dollar.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): It appears to me that the hon. member for Fort William has rather answered his own argument. We are all very much interested in seeing that the men who fought in the theatre of the war should have special consideration.

Mr. McGIBBON: Why do they not get it?

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): The act which was passed by parliament in that connection is being administered. If the act requires amendment, I suggest that we amend it. It has been well understood between the provinces and the Dominion that the Dominion government would shoulder first the responsibility of the war, and I think in that respect my hon. friend's position is well taken. If men who performed war service are under the existing pension act unable to receive consideration, the act should be amended. That is the direction in which we should move.

Mr. MANION: It has been amended very many times, but it has not reached many thousands whom it could reach.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): Then amend it, and let this House do the amending. My next point is that I do not think the case of the returned men should be confused with those who will come under the provisions of the act for pensions for disability. All the people who reach seventy years of age are not going to receive pensions. It is only those unable to support themselves who will come under this measure.

Mr. MANION: It is true of the soldiers.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): The same thing applies to them. But my contention is, that the provincial authorities should not have the responsibility of dealing with these cases; that it is purely and simply a federal matter and should be dealt with accordingly.