

Pension Act Amendment

There is further justification for such an increase to be found in the wage scale of common labour. When the pension rates were established after the first great war they were based on the medically-assessed ability of a veteran to take employment in the common labour market. Thus there is a definite relation between the 100 per cent pension rate and the wages applicable to common labour. The average rate for such labour is somewhere between 50 and 60 cents per hour in rural areas and 65 to 85 cents per hour in urban areas.

A low average for the dominion would be 55 cents per hour. A monthly wage at this rate for an 8-hour day, 5½-day week, would be approximately \$100. A 25 per cent increase over present rates would approximate this figure.

That seems to me a very fair and reasonable comparison, and I would point out to the minister that at the time this article was written the index stood at 146. Today I believe it is over 150 and will probably go higher. I would also point out that the index as it is given out does not, in my opinion, represent the true increase in the cost of living. This article shows that wages in the common labour market were taken into consideration, and if today the minister, or whoever worked out this formula or basis for the increase, is using the same method or formula, I hope he will tell the house when he closes the debate.

I would also like the minister to put on *Hansard*, if he can, a table giving a breakdown of the \$75 a month and a breakdown of the \$87 a month showing how they are apportioned for the support and maintenance of the disabled veteran.

Among the many letters that members have received is one from the Native Sons of Canada. This letter set forth the whole problem in a plain and simple way. The letter is dated February 7, 1948, and I do not think any member of this house could state the problem any better than it is set forth here:

This is an open letter on what should be a closed question—the debt of Canada to her disabled veterans and their dependents.

The rising cost of living has accentuated their plight and gained them the promise of a pension increase of \$10 a month. But this crumb from the table of Canadian plenty is not nearly enough.

The whole approach to the problem is wrong. The veteran's pension is not a gratuity. It is the wages of war. It is the attempt to pay a debt that cannot be measured in dollars and cents—our liability for lives lost and bodies battered wherever Canada's men fought our fight. We cannot replace the war torn mind and body nor bring back life to the fallen. We cannot make blind eyes see, put back the arms and legs that have gone, heal all the wounds and ailments incurred in our defence. We cannot restore the son to his mother, the husband to his wife, the father to his children.

[Mr. White (Hastings-Peterborough).]

What compensation then can we make? The very least we can do is to give these disabled veterans or their dependents the equivalent of their lost earning power—what as average Canadian workers they would receive in their pay envelope if war had not destroyed or diminished their ability to work. We should give these men and their families everything they would have had in the normal course of events had not the ruthless hand of war ripped them out of their accustomed place in civilian life in Canada.

The people of this country expect their elected representatives, before declaring a surplus and reducing taxation, to pay the debts of Canada. This is the greatest. For the honour of Canada—pay it!

One of the amendments to the act mentions the case of a widow whose deceased husband had a disability of fifty per cent or over. In such cases the widow receives a pension after the death of her husband. That is quite proper. But it has always appeared to me that there is a certain discrimination here because the widow of a veteran who had a disability of less than fifty per cent receives no pension after the death of her husband. Apparently the government has recognized liability and obligation to the widow. If so, why restrict this obligation to the widows of pensioners who had a disability of fifty per cent or over? No doubt the majority of pensioners have a disability of less than fifty per cent, and I think it is true to say that after the death of the veteran his widow then is probably more in need of assistance than during his lifetime. The only assistance which the widow of a veteran with a disability of less than fifty per cent can receive is under the War Veterans Allowance Act, and then she has to pass the means test.

I recommend to the minister that he give most careful and earnest consideration to an amendment to provide that widows of veterans in receipt of pension, with a disability of less than fifty per cent, shall receive a pension at least equal to the amount payable to widows under the war veterans act, without the means test. I would also suggest to the minister, inasmuch as he mentioned today the matter of veterans of world war I, that there should be some provision in the act to make it impossible from now on for the pension payable to any veteran of world war I to be cancelled or reduced; also an amendment by which all pensioners would receive automatic increases when they reach a certain age, irrespective of whether their disability is due to gunshot wound or not. So far as this party is concerned, Mr. Speaker, we are in favour of and advocate a basic pension rate of \$100 per month for 100 per cent disability. This is no new statement on the part of this party, because it has been advo-