

Pension Acts

order to get something on which we were unanimous, recommended that this kind of allowance for 100 per cent pensioners who require more than the 100 per cent should range from \$700 to \$3,500 a year. The government is shortchanging the committee and the veterans of this country by proposing a maximum figure of \$2,400 after our compromise suggestion of a maximum of \$3,500.

I fell there is still merit in the position taken in the Woods report, and by veterans organizations, to the effect that payments in addition to 100 per cent should be tied to special categories. If a person has a certain condition, he should receive an additional pension as a matter of right. We went over this in great detail. We suggested adding together the various percentages in some cases. Quadruplegics would receive very high percentages. Possibly that will not work. That is why we agreed to specify certain categories. This is what was done.

The national veterans organizations of Canada on pages 20 and 21 of their joint statement of March, 1970, set out categories that should be established. They suggested that if a veteran is in one or more of these categories he should receive a certain increased percentage in his pension. The veterans organizations took the position that it should be done in that way as a matter of right rather than something granted by the commission.

The legislation does not use the words means test or needs test. However, it is to be done at the discretion of the commission. Most of us feel there is a danger in that. It would have been far better to grant these increases to those whose pensions are already at 100 per cent, on the basis of a precise schedule, as a matter of right. I hope that when we get into committee and have an opportunity to compare what the government has included in the bill with what the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs recommended, the flexibility to which the minister referred will still obtain and that we will be able to make changes in this portion of the bill.

As is often the case with this kind of legislation, we welcome the fact that something is being done. We are glad that additional amounts are available for those people receiving 100 per cent pensions. However, we do not like the extent to which they seem to be matters of grace and matters of determination by the commission, rather than matters of right on the basis of certain categories or certain precise conditions.

I am sure that all hon. members were impressed with the remarks of the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe with regard to the quadruplegic who appeared before our committee. We were all impressed with the letter sent by several of them in the Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto. The number of quadruplegics in this country is not very great. Indeed, the number of those with extensive multiple disabilities is somewhat limited. It seems that this grateful country that we frequently talk about could well afford to grant these people everything they need. We must do everything we can in terms of money to lessen their discomfort and disenjoyment of life. We do not think this will be done properly if it is a matter of discretion. It should clearly be a

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

matter of right. Although we welcome the exceptional incapacity allowance which is included in this legislation, it is my hope that when we deal with this bill in committee there will be some improvements in this section along the line recommended by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

I now wish to deal with a very important, but complicated, question. That is the new set of procedures that will obtain under the revisions set out under this bill. Although in the first instance the government did not accept the recommendation of the Woods committee for a separate review board, but proposed its own arrangement, in committee we were quite pleased that in the end the government agreed in principle that the first two levels of consideration of pension applications be under the jurisdiction of the Canada Pension Commission, first the commission and then an entitlement board, but that in addition, a pension review board should be established, to be completely independent from the operations of the Canadian Pension Commission. We think this recommendation of the Woods committee was excellent. The fact that the government changed its position before the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs is evidence of the fact that the veterans organizations made a good case.

I believe this will make a difference to the veterans of this country. They will know that their applications for pensions will be dealt with by the Pension Commission and by an entitlement board, and if they are not satisfied they will have the opportunity of applying to another body that was not involved at the first two levels, namely a pension review board. We think this is good. We are glad it is being done. Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, in my attempt to compare the language of Bill C-203 with the recommendations made by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, I feel that some subtle but very significant changes have been made. My impression is that the members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs not only wanted this pension review board to be completely independent but as informal as possible so that the veteran or his representative would receive the most humane consideration of his case.

• (4:30 p.m.)

As I read the legislation I get the distinct impression that the pension review board is being set up somewhat along the lines of a court; it seems to me that too much red tape has been introduced, too many ground rules are specified. It is all done in such a way that instead of this review board being an informal arena in which aggrieved veterans can have their cases examined in human terms they will be present at a courtroom scene where their chances will not be as great as they would otherwise be. If the government is prepared to go this far, and agree to the establishment of a separate review board as proposed in the Woods Report, as requested by the veterans organizations and as recommended by the Standing Committee, I think it should set the board up in such a way that it will really work—not only that, but give the impression to everyone that it is, in fact, working.