

Pension Act and Other Acts

Through this bill, the government wants to increase pensions for veterans while keeping in mind the cost of living. We have been told by many veterans that the increase based on the cost of living does not amount to much. Therefore, veterans are not satisfied with their pensions.

As far as we are concerned, we wish to tell the government that we are pleased that they have been granted this increase due to the increased cost of living.

Mr. Speaker, we are greatly indebted to war veterans. We know what they did for society. We know what they went through, which other people did not experience.

At the same time, I would like to tell the government that other citizens who are not veterans also have equal rights. They are also entitled to our consideration, because I suppose those who died for society and left widows and children behind them should also be considered.

I would give veterans more consideration because they went to war, but we owe a great deal to those who remained in Canada and laid down their lives on the field of labour, those who died for their country and who did their utmost towards its development.

Mr. Speaker, if the increases granted to veterans are justified, we should not be asking ourselves why these pension increases are granted. We must grant them because the cost of living is going up. Why is it going up?

Mr. Speaker, why are we not in a position to administer through an adjustment of the cost of living, in order to prevent it from going up? When you let the cost of living go up, you do so for everybody.

The cost of living, Mr. Speaker, increases for everyone, not only for the veterans and the aged. Some people have no job; they live on welfare allowances and pensions of all kinds. They do not get enough because the cost of living increases and it does so because of them.

If we allocate increases to all these citizens, we shall contribute as well to push up the cost of living. If the cost of living goes up, we also raise taxes.

And this, Mr. Speaker, is a useless exercise. This economic uneasiness reveals to us that our economy goes on falling; it has no stability. It is completely out of kilter and the more we apply this ideological system, the more we apply our economic system, the more we unbalance our economy and the more it becomes difficult to live.

The increase that will be granted to old people and to veterans will be offset by the increase in the cost of living. This will leave them with almost nothing. It is almost useless to grant increases if we are not prepared to deal with the main causes of such an economic disorder.

I am for increases. I want people to have a better life, but I know that we are not dealing with the real problems, that the essential causes are deeper. That is where we should strike first. No one member is ready to take the necessary steps in order to eliminate the causes of the present economic disorder.

The increase in the cost of living should logically be followed by an increase in pensions and wages of all kinds. The situation is deteriorating and becoming ever more complicated.

[Mr. Latulippe.]

It is over this aspect, Mr. Speaker, that we should ponder. At the same time—one cannot ask him everything—I would ask the minister to examine the problem to find out whether there would be another means to curtail this increase in the cost of living. We must find a solution to this problem, we must reduce the cost of living. We have been looking for a solution for a long time.

Instead of raising pensions, we ought to lower the cost of living; this would simplify the situation and enable Canadians to enjoy an easier life.

When the unions ask for higher salaries, we could tell them: Instead of increasing salaries, we shall reduce prices; then you will no longer have any reason to ask for pay boosts.

If we reduce prices, we will leave more purchasing power in the hands of the citizens; our economy will be more viable. Exports will be facilitated because our prices will be lowered by as much.

[*English*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I should advise the House that if the minister speaks now he will close the debate.

Hon. Arthur Laing (Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank all hon. members who have participated in this debate. I think that the nature, the aims and the objectives of the Department of Veterans Affairs are such that we can keep this kind of debate on a more non-partisan basis than might be the case in the discussion of legislation concerning any other department.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is truly a service department dedicated to the service of human beings who have served this country. I have been with the department long enough to have a great deal of confidence in the department itself and in those in charge of it who discharge their duties honourably and as fairly as they can within the confines of the resources granted them by the government.

• (2100)

I want to pay tribute to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. Through the years it has conducted its business on a basis of anxiety to do the best it can without introducing political dispute. The kind of discussion that took place here tonight could have been participated in by members of parties on all sides of the House. Some of it went beyond the content of this bill, but that is understandable because the bill provided an avenue through which members of the House could express their wishes on behalf of the veterans.

I wish to deal with the remarks of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) who has made a rather deep study of pensions, not only in Veterans Affairs but in other departments of government. He stressed that he was anxious that the increase in the cost of living provision should be no substitute for consideration of the increase in the basic rates of pensions and of war veterans allowances. I made that very clear. I have said before, and I say it in the House now, that when we are distributing some \$229 million per year in veterans