

Supply—Veterans Affairs

The other part of the question is the one I am more interested in.

The only proviso is that such supplementation may only be paid during residence in Canada. Other than the foregoing, no provision exists to pay moneys from public funds to imperial veterans who were non-pre-war residents and have income from some British source on the grounds that their income is affected by the change in rate of exchange.

The position is this in one particular instance. A distinguished member of the imperial forces, who began to reside in Newfoundland shortly after world war I and who has been a permanent resident there ever since, I believe has not had his pension supplemented. I was wondering what the answer is to such a case. There are more than one involved, but that is the only one I know of. I wonder if the minister can tell me something about the case.

Mr. Gregg: To try to answer the hon. member for St. John's East first before I come to the other questions, may I say that the situation has not changed a great deal. The group in which he and many of us are particularly interested, owing to the effects of devaluation, are those men who served with the British forces, were not domiciled in Canada before service, were pensioners and came to Canada during past years. Two things of some assistance have happened. One of them is the fact that under our recent legislation small pensioners who came to Canada twenty years ago and have lived here since may be eligible to receive some help under this new legislation. The other one is that the head of the British ministry of pensions here in Ottawa, about the end of our last session of parliament, made a special trip to Britain to seek some assistance; and he obtained assistance to meet hardship. I will admit it was something of the nature of our own war veterans allowance assistance fund. We were called upon—and we are happy to do what we can, although we have no responsibility for doing so—to co-operate with the British ministry of pensions by helping to provide information.

Mr. Higgins: Is there any difference in the type of pension, whether it is long service or disability?

Mr. Gregg: What I am speaking of, of course, is disability pension only.

Mr. Higgins: Long service is not affected at all?

Mr. Gregg: As far as I know, there is no assistance in that regard.

I welcome the opportunity provided by several members to say a word with regard to a parliamentary committee. During the last six months I have had the pleasure of speaking to quite a number of veterans

organizations throughout the country. As has been indicated here this afternoon, many of them have represented to me that they would like to have a parliamentary committee from time to time. It might be just as well if I at least had the virtue of consistency and gave to the house what I have said on those occasions.

I believe that there are times for a parliamentary committee on veterans affairs and that there are times for a period of freedom from a parliamentary committee. One of the times for a parliamentary committee is when the government is submitting to parliament important legislation introducing new principles which affect veterans and which require intensive study. A great example of that, of course, was in the years during the war and at the end of the war when orders in council were converted into statutes. But one of the times for freedom from a committee is when the department is absorbed in consolidating changes in legislation and in adapting its administrative technique to meet the new conditions; and I think this last year or two has been one of those periods.

Time and staff have been needed to keep abreast of the changes designed to meet the changing needs. I do not think any hon. member will accuse my department of being averse to bringing in amendments to legislation if we felt that they were needed. In addition to the quite impressive list of changes that were made as a result of the report of the 1948 parliamentary committee, last year quite voluntarily we brought in not world-shaking but still valuable amendments to the War Veterans Allowance Act. This present year we have brought in what I hope will prove to be valuable amendments to the War Veterans Allowance Act. The changes in pension rates, the 1948 changes in war veterans allowance rates and the various changes in the legislation have required some time to digest and to put into force. Government departments I suppose must move slowly and at least they should move carefully. If for no other reason they have to move slowly because they have to move in conformity with some nineteen or twenty other departments. I do not at all mind being pushed as Minister of Veterans Affairs, but I do not want to have the department pushed into making its officers available for study in a parliamentary committee of matters about which nothing can be done at that particular time, and I hasten to add those particular words. I did not want to be guilty of kidding the excellent troops, as might have been done this year, by setting up a committee thus encouraging veterans and other bodies to send representatives long