

Pension Act

tive and support assistance to the Canadian Pension Commission, the Pension Review Board and the Bureau of Pensions Advocates.

Mr. Paproski: The government took that idea right out of our book.

Mr. Marshall: Let me tell hon. members that our party would immediately introduce widows' pensions for widows whose husbands had received pensions of less than 48 per cent. Hopefully, we shall now be able to increase the Pension Review Board with an additional two ad hoc members and appoint a deputy chairman who will be able to preside over hearings, cut down the backlog of cases and help our veterans. At present, many veterans die without the opportunity to have their pension applications or appeals dealt with. I hope now that they will realize, before they die, that Canada really cares for them and has tried to repay for their sacrifices.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my party I wish to make it clear that we readily support Bill C-11. As has already been made clear, its purpose is to strengthen the Pension Review Board by increasing the length of the term of the members thereof, and also by creating a deputy chairman so that at least two meetings of the board can take place at the same time. The bill has the further purpose of providing for the appointment of two ad hoc members. This, also, will enable the board to cope with the rising number of cases.

From my point of view, the best proof of the efficacy of this board is the record of the cases with which it has dealt. While I do not have the figures before me, I think that even as late as yesterday the rate of reversals was over 30 per cent. That means that more than 30 per cent of the cases referred to the Pension Review Board are reversed. In other words, the Pension Review Board gives a decision in favour of the veteran, whereas the Canadian Pension Commission, through its various workings, has ruled against the veteran. That is not to be taken as a criticism of the Canadian Pension Commission. It follows the law and tries to give the veteran the best break possible. We were also told in committee that the Canadian Pension Commission takes note of the decisions of the Pension Review Board and tries not to make the same mistakes.

It is also noteworthy that whereas previous attempts to set up an appellant body failed, this one, established following the Woods commission study in 1971, has been so successful that on all sides we are prepared not only to continue it but to strengthen it so that it can do its job.

I pay tribute to the chairman of the Pension Review Board, who was a member of this House when I came here some years ago. I refer to René Jutras. I pay tribute to him, and to all members of the board, for the good work the board has done.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I think the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall)

[Mr. Marshall.]

has done a good service today in relating the work of the Pension Review Board to the work of the Canadian Pension Commission and the work of the Bureau of Pensions Advocates. I hope the plea he made will be considered, that the Bureau of Pensions Advocates will explore all ways for helping veterans to get their cases heard successfully. I hope that, as well, further efforts will be made by the Canadian Pension Commission to reduce the backlog of the cases before it.

It seems awfully hard on veterans who are making applications years after the war to find that their cases could take a full year or even longer. I appreciate that the backlog has been reduced a bit and that the delay will not be as great as it was a few years ago. But every veteran is concerned; every veteran feels he has the right to have his case dealt with quickly. I therefore hope that the department and the government will give whatever assistance is needed to the Canadian Pension Commission and the Bureau of Pensions Advocates to allow these cases to proceed as rapidly as possible.

There was an understanding among us that, since this bill does just a few things and we are all in agreement with it, we will not extend the debate. Actually, I hope we can very soon pass the bill on second reading. I think it is in order for members such as the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe and myself to take this opportunity to press again for the consideration of items of unfinished business in veterans affairs which we feel strongly should be given attention.

● (1250)

I am happy to say that the number of items not attended to has been reduced. The job done by the Woods commission, the job done by the Hermann commission, and before that by Dr. Richardson on Hong Kong veterans, the non-partisan way in which the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs works, and the help of the minister—who I feel does a good job trying to fight for veterans inside the cabinet he has to live with—have resulted in many improvements. The picture is better today than it was a number of years ago.

Even so, the points that my friend from Newfoundland just referred to must not be allowed to go on. I underline the case of World War I veterans who were prisoners of war. When we finally got around to compensating prisoners of war, why did the government leave them out? We got the word yesterday, and I repeat it, that there are only about 200 of them still living. It would only cost about \$200,000 a year to give them that compensation. That is \$200,000 this year; it will decline year by year. In a few years there will be not any of them left. I hope the minister will in this session bring in legislation to extend prisoner of war compensation to those who were POWs in World War I.

At the same time, I urge that the case that escapers and evaders have been making is a valid one and that they, too, ought to be covered as prisoners of war. I hope that this suggestion will receive earnest consideration from the minister. There is no doubt in my mind as to where his heart is in these things. It is those fellows in Treasury Board, Finance, and so on, with whom he has to fight. However, he has demonstrated