

There is a tendency in normal parliaments to take it for granted that if a piece of legislation is improved in a session, that is all that can be expected for the session. Usually the most one can hope for is a further improvement in the next session or the next parliament. But this is not an ordinary parliament. There may be some of us around who will be saying: What have you done for us lately? Frankly, I hope that before this session ends the minister's commitment that there will be further study of the War Veterans Allowance Act will be carried out. I believe it can be said that our general plan in the committee is to keep the first item of the estimates open for a while so that we can discuss this matter again. Thus I hope that after the minister and his officials have studied possible changes in the War Veterans Allowance Act, the minister will come again before the committee to discuss those changes and see whether during the session he can bring in another bill amending the War Veterans Allowance Act.

• (1600)

The hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe spelt out three areas that certainly require amendment. The first was the residence requirement, which in the main affects a number of Canadian veterans living in the United Kingdom as well as other countries; the second was the change with respect to the age to which children of veterans can be covered, and then there was the change respecting the requirement of 12 months' service in world war I, namely that service in the United Kingdom should count and that the 12 month period be relaxed.

In addition to those changes which should be made, I would press very strongly the point I made on second reading and also in the standing committee, namely that the anomalies with respect to the ceilings on permissible income be straightened out. The minister gave us the figures today, which of course are quite accurate. They show that the new ceiling on the permissible income of a single veteran is \$191.14 a month and for a married veteran the new ceiling is \$327.21 a month.

The minister also drew attention today to the fact that the extra \$15 for a single veteran and \$30 for a married veteran which old age and guaranteed income supplement recipients got in 1972 is still to be allowed outside of the permissible income, rather than raising the level. We now have the anomaly that for a single veteran under 65 the ceiling on his permissible income is \$191.14, whereas for a single veteran over 65 it is \$206.14. There is also an anomaly in the case of a married veteran. If both the veteran and his wife are under 65, the ceiling is \$327.21. If one is over 65 the ceiling is \$342.21, and if both are over 65 the ceiling is \$357.21. It seems to me that this is an unsatisfactory situation and one that certainly ought to be cleared up. Frankly, I do not see why we should be asked to wait until next session or until there is another election. The minister has done a pretty good job of getting things moving, and I hope that we can move on this question during the course of this session.

As a matter of fact, I hope that another look at the means test under the War Veterans Allowance Act will be taken. Although I think we have come a long way in our concepts of pensions, allowances and benefits since the War Veterans Allowance Act was first established in 1930,

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I should still like to see us begin with the veterans when we explore the idea of a guaranteed annual income. The War Veterans Allowance Act might well be turned into such a piece of legislation for our veterans.

Since we are all anxious to get this legislation through as quickly as we can, the only other comment I want to make is that I hope we will soon see the bill to amend the Pension Act with regard to the basic rate of disability pension. As the minister knows, and as the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe indicated a moment ago, there is in the works that very interesting and useful report of the joint study group that the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs endorsed unanimously and quickly, calling for a substantial increase in the basic rate of the disability pension. The report also calls for it to be escalated annually, in accordance not just with the cost of living increase but in accordance with the rise in the wage levels of the five selected categories in the federal public service.

I regard this report as monumental, not only with respect to the formula for arriving at what the basic rate should be, but particularly with respect to the formula for escalating pensions year by year. The Minister of Veterans Affairs will be establishing a first in social legislation in this parliament if he brings in a bill that has in it an escalation formula based on that principle of providing increases related to the rising standard of living. I invite him to aim at that goal of being the first minister to bring in this kind of escalation formula, and I know of no group that deserves better such a progressive approach to this problem than the veterans of this country.

We welcome this bill; we approve of everything that is in it. But that does not mean we are satisfied. By no means do we say that the job is done. There are the further improvements we have pointed out. They really must be made, and we should like to see them made at this session. We also want to see very soon the other bill which will provide for an increase in the basic rate under the Pension Act, and also the very progressive escalation formula which the standing committee has unanimously recommended.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, like the previous speakers, I should like to speed up the passing of this bill as much as possible. But since there are many veterans in my constituency, and since I myself have an elder brother who is a veteran, I consider it my duty to take part in the debate on this bill, for it concerns a class of people of whom our country is justly proud.

I congratulate the new minister on such a senior appointment; the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) could not have made a better choice. The Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) is a very likeable, a most trustworthy man. He has the ability needed to take charge of this department and put through the amendments that veterans have been demanding. There can be no doubt that Bill C-148 was largely inspired by him.

This bill proposes important amendments to the War Veterans Allowance Act. I am glad to see that more recognition is to be given to the right of veterans and their families to enjoy a standard of living that reflects, as far as possible, the material wealth of our country. But for