

*Veterans Allowance Increases*

I think the picture is reasonably clear in regard to those things that were covered in the Woods report. We started with a lot of disagreement, a certain amount of disillusionment and some uncertainty, but as a result of our living together with this problem for a long period of time, and as a result of the very good work done by the veterans organizations which appeared before the committee, we reached a pretty solid consensus about the things that should be done in regard to those matters that had been referred to the Woods committee. As a result of that unanimity I plead that there be no more delay and that the legislation be brought in. I am satisfied this House will give it very quick passage indeed.

However, before one leaves the Pension Act, which as I say was referred to the Woods committee, one has to take note of the fact that there was not referred to the Woods committee the basic amount of the disability pension. Any suggestion about increasing veterans pensions—I am now talking about disability pensions—was not, therefore, part of the terms of reference of the Woods committee nor part of the terms of reference of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

I do not think we will be as proud of ourselves as we like to think we will be if, despite all this work, and despite our devoting time in the House of Commons to the question of veterans legislation, nothing is done to increase the rate of pensions paid under the Pension Act. I hope that matter will be dealt with.

If it is necessary to bring in two separate bills in this regard, then let that be done. Let there be included in one bill the matters we have agreed upon, those matters about which there is unanimity in every case or almost unanimity, and I am convinced that every party in the House will let the bill reach the statute books in record time. Then, let us also have another bill dealing with the rates of pension paid under the Pension Act.

This leads me to the other aspect of the motion moved by the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe, namely that something should be done at this time to provide for early payment of adequate increases in the allowances paid under the War Veterans Allowance Act. To my regret the subject of the War Veterans Allowance Act, not having been referred to the Woods committee, was also not included in the terms of reference of the standing committee. But the veterans and widows who come under the aegis of the War Veterans Allowance Act are the people who seem always to get the short end of the stick.

I plead that the minister not delay any longer the bringing in of amendments to that act. Let him not ask us to wait for the White Paper on social security or on income maintenance, or whatever it is to be; that matter has been delayed for so long that there is no telling when it will be brought in. And when it is, I assume that it will deal with matters relating to the population of Canada in general.

I have no hesitation in standing here as a non-veteran, like the minister, and saying that we owe something special to the veterans who have served this country. I

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want to see what is sometimes called the social security legislation for our veterans, or call it, if you will, social welfare legislation—the War Veterans Allowance Act—kept a few stages higher than the social security or social welfare legislation that applies to the population as a whole.

That was the basis on which the War Veterans Allowance Act was brought in in the first place. That was in the period when the old age pension was payable at age 70 only, and on a means test. The purpose of the War Veterans Allowance Act was to provide to those who had served in World War I an opportunity to get at age 60 a pension that would compare with the old age pension that was paid at age 70, and to get that pension not only at an earlier age but on a means test that was less stringent than the old age pension means test.

Over the years there seems to have been the tendency somehow or other to ask why, since this is social welfare legislation, it should not be enmeshed in our general welfare legislation. I do not think that approach is good enough. Those of us in this Parliament who cannot claim to be veterans would be a little ashamed, I think, if we were to abolish the principle that Parliament ought to do something better for those who served their country in time of war.

Therefore, I call for the War Veterans Allowance Act to be dealt with separately from the white paper on social welfare or income maintenance. We have touched on some matters already without waiting for that paper. It used to be agreed that everything had to wait for that paper which is to be brought down by the Minister of National Health and Welfare, but last December there was an announcement, and then in March certain legislation was presented to the House. I was very glad that the legislation was introduced without waiting for that paper, because it dealt with the pensions of retired civil servants, retired members of the armed forces, retired personnel of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and quite a few others. It even made a slight reference to Members of Parliament. None of these groups was called upon to wait for the white paper on social security. I am not at the moment asking any questions about the motives for that action at that time, for my views are well known, but the fact of the matter is that the ban against dealing with matters of this kind until the white paper on social security has been published was broken by the introduction of that legislation.

I think the same can be said with regard to the white paper on unemployment insurance. Certainly the committee dealing with that white paper is asked time and time again how come it has that white paper before the country is given the white paper on social security. So I suggest that the sacred principle that we must wait for the white paper of the Minister of National Health and Welfare has been shot high, wide and handsome.

If there is any group of people that deserves special consideration, it is the group we know as our veterans. Therefore, I insist that it will not be enough to bring in legislation simply implementing our report, and hence dealing only with the Pension Act and those matters