

Pension Acts

receive raised so that the increase in their guaranteed income supplement would not come off their war veterans allowance. It seems to me that as that has been done for the last three years, there ought to be no question about it this year. I realize that this applies only to the months of January, February and March, because, beginning in April, there will be new rates both for the guaranteed income supplement and for payments made under the War Veterans Allowance Act. We are talking about small amounts of money and it seems a shame that we have to plead and argue for these little amounts to be given to our veterans. However, Mr. Speaker, as the House is aware, the whole question of rates under the Pension Act and of allowances under the War Veterans Allowance Act is not now before us. Those questions will be dealt with in separate legislation. At this point we are dealing with Bill C-203 which, in the main, amends the administrative aspects of the Pension Act.

As the minister and the previous speaker pointed out, this bill covers a great many matters. Indeed, the Woods Report contained 148 recommendations. In our standing committee's report on the white paper, we pronounced on each of those 148 recommendations. In some cases where we made favourable recommendations, the government has acted upon them in the bill. So, any attempt to deal with all the details of this bill at the second reading stage would be in vain. Therefore, like the two previous speakers, I wish to direct my remarks to five or six of the main points in the bill now before us.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, we welcome the change in the bill regarding the benefit of doubt. Perhaps it is only a change in wording, but we hope that it will have a far reaching effect. The legislation, as it now stands, in section 70 provides for the benefit of doubt to be given to the veteran; however, the language of section 70 is couched in such a way that it is still necessary for the veteran to produce more evidence than seems to us to be necessary. We are very glad that the language of section 70 of the Pension Act has been done away with and that in its place we are to have the language proposed in a new section 1A. I think it is worth putting that language into *Hansard*. It reads:

CONSTRUCTION

1A. The provisions of this Act shall be liberally construed—

The word "liberally" is spelled with a small "l", I am glad to say. The section continues as follows:

—and interpreted to the end that the recognized obligation of the people and Government of Canada to provide compensation to those members of the forces who have been disabled or have died as a result of military service, and to their dependants, may be fulfilled.'

That is the basic ground rule, and this has been included in the new act as new section 1A immediately after the title itself. We think that even its location in the legislation is significant.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Other sections of the new act will spell out the details of the procedure

that are in line with this ground rule. I know that many veterans across this country are hoping that this new and more realistic benefit of doubt approach will result in an opportunity for them to receive a consideration that they have not yet received. So, Mr. Speaker, this is one feature of the legislation that we welcome most warmly, the new provision for a real benefit of doubt to be accorded to veterans who apply for pensions under the Pension Act.

The second feature of this bill to which I should like to refer is the section dealing with the Hong Kong veterans, their widows and other dependents. I believe this is one of a number of instances, and it is an important one, in which the actual recommendation of the Woods Committee has been followed down the line. The government accepted this recommendation when it produced the white paper. The standing committee went along with it as well, and now the heart of this recommendation is contained in this bill.

● (4:20 p.m.)

As I understand it, any veteran who was at Hong Kong, and I welcome the minister's reference to the Winnipeg Grenadiers and others who were there in 1941 and were prisoners of war during the years that followed, who has any assessable disability is to be regarded as having at least a 50 per cent disability and therefore a 50 per cent pension. As hon. members are aware, the magic of 50 per cent is that the widow of any such veteran will qualify for a pension as a right.

The new legislation is worded in such a way that it is quite clear that this also applies to the widows of those Hong Kong veterans who have already died. This provision, Mr. Speaker, is eminently satisfactory except for the effective date. We think it should have been put into effect two or three years ago. At any rate, Mr. Speaker, we welcome it wholeheartedly.

I now move to the third item on which I wish to make a few comments. I refer to the section in the legislation dealing with what is to be called an exceptional incapacity allowance. The minister can point out that in the end the veterans organizations seem to be willing to accept this provision in the form in which the government has included it in the bill, but I am not completely satisfied. The government should at least have accepted the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. I remind the minister and hon. members that that recommendation was in the form of a compromise.

The minister stated that the government is doubling its original offer and that this is a response to the members of the standing committee. Whether that means anything depends on the original offer. In the white paper, despite the more generous suggestions in the Woods report, the government proposed what is now called an exceptional incapacity allowance ranging from \$400 to \$1,200. Because the government is offering from \$800 to \$2,400, the minister says the amount has been doubled. The difficulty is that the standing committee, after discussing this at great length and being willing to compromise, in