

Veterans' Pensions

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Chairman, I did not get up on second reading so that we could get the bill through quickly. However, I would like to make a brief submission to the minister now and ask him what he is prepared to do on the matter.

First, I would like to add my agreement and support for what is being done today and say that I support the remarks made by my colleague, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

There is still a very small group of veterans in Canada who are totally left out, either by recognition, rights or entitlement to benefits under our veterans' legislation. This small group who have an association were in Ottawa a few weeks ago, and at that time I believe they met with the minister and with members of the Liberal caucus, the Conservative caucus and our caucus. The people about whom I am speaking, if the minister will hear my representation, are probably at most the 200 surviving veterans of the Spanish civil war who were members of the Mackenzie-Papineau battalion who were the first to fight against the Fascists. They were made outlaws in their own country because they violated the Foreign Enlistment Act. They journeyed to Europe by many various and devious ways, to England, through France and into northern Spain. They are in their own right and by all definitions of the word heroes. Many were decorated by the republican government of Spain at that time. Many were wounded, captured, tortured and died in the fight against fascism.

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Had the rest of the western democracies listened to them, we may have headed off Hitler sooner than we finally did. They were vilified by some in their own countries, and certainly ignored and deserted by their country. All they asked for when they met with parliamentarians a few weeks ago was recognition as veterans. They were not asking for benefits or anything else, just recognition that they no longer be considered outlaws in our own country.

I hope the minister will take this to his cabinet colleagues so that they do in fact receive recognition as veterans, and more. Upon receiving that recognition, they should automatically get the right to receive veterans' benefits, whether it be disability pensions—and any medical practitioner could assure the minister as to whether their disability is attributable to war wounds—or war veterans allowance. I doubt if very many would even ask for those benefits. We could undo the wrong of all these years if we made the gesture of recognizing these gentlemen as veterans. I do not know if it is still on the statutes, but if it is we could possibly repeal the Foreign Enlistment Act. That may be sufficient.

As a result of the minister's meetings with them, is he agreeable to trying to provide that recognition for at most, I suspect, 200? They only know of 125 but there may be a few more scattered around Canada who have not come forward and made themselves known. Is the minister giving consideration to that? Will he take whatever action is necessary, either by regulation, legislation or whatever else is required, to include as veterans members of the Mackenzie-Papineau bat-

talion of the Spanish civil war, with all the rights and entitlements thereto?

Mr. Bosley: Mr. Chairman, I am a little confused about the procedure. I thought we were going to get answers as we went along. If we could, I would like that, because I am somewhat confused about a couple of matters that, if we were going to Standing committee, would be raised there. I need to know, and I am not sure how to find out since we just saw the bill today, what is counted as exempt income in calculating the WVA now? Is it just the GIS, or the OAS and GIS?

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Chairman, in what is commonly referred to as OAS and GIS and war veterans allowance, there is a rate that is determined. As far as receiving benefits, in some cases they vary. The recipient of war veterans allowance today probably receives more than ever before in the history of Canada. Let us use a figure of \$6,000, which is not the actual figure; I do not have it here today. If their income is over that, they do not receive WVA. Does that answer the hon. member's question? It does not.

Mr. Bosley: Mr. Chairman, the minister indicated in his speech and the documents indicate that the discrepancy today between, for example, a single individual under 65 in receipt of the WVA is receiving something in the order of \$70 a month less than somebody who is over 65, and the reason for that is the effect of the exemption for the income that is referred to in the speech as GIS. What is indicated is an intent to change the deduction or to change the exemption category to reduce the level of OAS and GIS income which will count as exempt income.

If I can put the question again, what now counts as exempt income in calculating the WVA, GIS or OAS and GIS?

Mr. MacDonald: As I understand what the questioner is referring to, \$2.88 is old age security and the balance is GIS. He is also in receipt of WVA. I might tell the hon. member that many times, unless he has the full details, WVA, OAS and GIS is very confusing. If the answer is not satisfactory, please feel free to put it forward again and we will see if we can get an answer.

Mr. Bosley: What I am trying to find out, Mr. Chairman, is where the \$70 discrepancy comes from. Can the minister give me some figures which show me how the \$70 difference is composed? Is it composed entirely of GIS? It is composed of GIS and OAS? Is it composed of some other exempt income? I understood it to be, and I was really trying to clarify it, OAS and GIS. My problem then became, since OAS and GIS is higher than \$70 if you are in receipt of GIS, where does the \$70 figure come from that is the basis of the attempt to equalize the payments of which we all approve?

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Chairman, I have to confess that I find the hon. member's question a little confusing. When the hon. member is talking of pensions, could he determine for me whether he is talking of the under 65 or over 65?