

I remember quite well that towards the end of the sittings of that special committee a special drafting committee was appointed to draft the proposed amendments to the Pension Act. As I recall it, that drafting committee consisted of the hon. member for Vancouver-Burrard (Mr. Clark), the hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Speakman) and myself, and we drafted that part of the report which dealt with amendments or proposed amendments to the Pension Act.

When the special committee presented to the house its report not a single member of that committee thought for one moment that the last word had been said with regard to pension legislation; no one imagined that for a moment. We realized that there were many problems affecting returned soldiers that would present themselves to parliament again which would require further consideration. We are now beginning to realize the extent and importance of some of the problems which now present themselves throughout the country. During the course of our discussion of two years ago, someone made the statement that the United States pensions bill in respect of the civil war had reached its maximum height in 1920. Is it to be thought for one moment that the people of Canada have reached the maximum of their responsibilities in connection with those who served in the Great war? I do not think so. We have a great deal more to do before we can finally and fully implement the promises which were made to our returned soldiers and to their dependents. It may well be, although we were unanimous in the committee of 1928 in deciding not to depart from the fundamental principles of the Pension Act, that we may feel this year the necessity of departing from those principles. I realize the difficulties that confront an applicant for pension. He has a very difficult onus to discharge, particularly so in the case of the burnt-out man. It is hard for such a man to prove that his premature senile condition is attributable to war service, and yet there is a moral certainty in a great number of instances that such is the case. The same would apply to a number of ailments of a slowly developing nature. It may be that a full consideration of this problem which presents itself to-day will require some departure from the fundamental principles of pension policy which we have followed so far.

I would like to say a few words in support of some of the suggestions that have been made by the hon. member for Vancouver-Burrard. I agree with him that the existing machinery which is placed at the disposal of the returned soldier for proving his entitlement to pension is not adequate. Following

[Mr. Thorson.]

the suggestion of the hon. member for West Lambton (Mr. Gray), I would like to see provision made for service bureaus in the larger centres such as we have here in Ottawa under the auspices of the Canadian Legion. These bureaus could assist the official soldier advisers throughout the country. I agree also that greater facilities should be afforded to the applicant for pension in bringing his case to the attention of the Board of Pension Commissioners. It might be an excellent system to have the board send out a quorum of its members to the various districts of Canada in order that they could discuss and determine the case of the applicant on the spot. There is another suggestion which should be presented to the special committee that is to be set up, for its consideration, namely, that the membership of the federal appeal board should be increased. The work of that board is becoming so congested as to create great disaffection among the returned soldiers of this country. We may also succeed this year in having the jurisdiction of the federal appeal board very materially increased; we have in this house approved of such an increase several times but on each occasion our proposal for such increase of appellate jurisdiction has been defeated in the upper house.

That brings me to what I think was the most important suggestion made by the hon. member for Vancouver-Burrard, a suggestion with which I entirely and completely agree, namely, that we should, if it is at all possible, arrange for a joint special committee of this house and of the Senate to consider the problems of the returned soldiers as they may be presented. These are some of the suggestions that occur to me and I would earnestly appeal to every hon. member of this house that he deal with the problems of the returned soldiers in the same spirit that has actuated members of parliament uniformly in the past, not from the point of view of any particular party, or any particular advantage, but only from the point of view of the returned soldiers themselves.

I would strongly endorse the suggestion of the Minister of Pensions and National Health that the resolution be not now pressed, but that it be sent to the special committee that is to deal with the problems of returned soldiers this session. I venture to express the hope now that I may be privileged to be a member of that special committee. If I am so honoured I assure the hon. members of this house that I will do my utmost to deal with such problems in as sympathetic a manner as their greatness deserves.