

*Pension Acts*

the scope of the legislative changes which are included in the bill.

Besides, the *Legion*, which is the national publication of the Royal Canadian Legion, in an issue which came out during the weekend, was entirely of that opinion.

Before commenting on the provisions of the bill, Mr. Speaker, I think it would be appropriate to make a few remarks about veterans pensions and the recipients themselves; why they receive them and why we award them.

There are nearly a million veterans in Canada today. They represent the contingents of Canadians who fought in the South African campaign, in World Wars I and II, in Korea and in other United Nations peace-keeping operations. Fortunately most of them do not bear any visible scars from combat but there are many who do. There are also, left behind, many widows, mothers, sons and daughters of those who made the supreme sacrifice. These are the people for whom this bill has been written. There are 133,212 veterans and 29,100 dependents in receipt of pensions as a direct result of death, or disability, arising out of military service; 37,000 of these pensioners are survivors of World War I and 125,000 are World War II veterans and their dependents.

[*English*]

It was the Canadian fighting men in the first world war who, a few short years after Confederation, brought Canada from a boisterous youthfulness to sinewy maturity. More than 53 years ago, on an April morning on the slopes of Vimy Ridge, they carved, with their bayonets, the name of Canada into the granite monuments to sacrifice. They brought Canada into full-fledged nationhood so meaningfully and so forcefully that this country was included as a signatory to the Treaty of Versailles.

A generation later, legions of Canadians again answered their country's call to arms and, like their fathers before them, sprang to its defence with a fearless defiance. They fought and died for the freedom of Canada. They fought because their institutions and ideals were threatened. They fought against philosophies which were antagonistic to our way of life and to our democratic institutions. And they fought for those ideals in faraway and forbidding places. They fought, and some of them died, in the cold, dark, winter nights in the North Atlantic; in Hong Kong, Italy, Normandy and the low countries; in the dull, smoky skies over Germany and even in the steaming jungles of Burma.

[*Translation*]

It is for these men, their families and the dependents of those who have died, that my department exists. It is for these men that successive Canadian governments for 50 years have sought to keep pensions, allowances, medical treatment, education and training, up to date with the changing times and circumstances. It is for these men that this government is introducing this bill.

The Pension Act has been the cornerstone of the Veterans Charter for half a century. It is the main legislation through which Canada recognizes her obligation to compensate for disability and death in so far as it

is possible to equate monetary compensation with human suffering and bereavement.

The Pension Act provides not only for the payment of pensions to the disabled veteran but also to his widow and orphans and to his dependent parents, sisters and brothers. Pension entitlement can also make the recipient eligible for other benefits such as medical treatment, war veterans allowances, special re-employment training, funeral and burial grants and, after his death, advanced educational assistance for his dependent children.

Mr. Speaker, in all stages of the work leading to the presentation of this new bill, which incorporates such a massive overhaul of the Pension Act, the keynote was flexibility.

[*English*]

This flexibility was deliberately built into the whole procedure by the use of the white paper technique which invited dialogue and input from the people most vitally concerned, the veterans themselves. Their enthusiastic participation in this dialogue is a credit to the technique and to themselves. It is also a tribute to the open-door policy adopted by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. The standing committee listened diligently, conscientiously and patiently and came up with a most valuable report. I have previously spoken about the dedication of the members of the standing committee and the wisdom and scope of their recommendations. I can only repeat my appreciation of their meritorious services.

There are so many benefits in this bill that I shall not attempt to describe them all in detail at this time, but I am very anxious to explain the five most important ones. There are some changes and innovations which will affect more veterans than others; and there are some which will have a more immediate effect on those veterans whose hardships are more extreme than others.

● (3:20 p.m.)

The first major new proposal which I should like to explain is the exceptional incapacity allowance. This new benefit refers to certain 100 per cent pensioners who suffer extraordinary physical, social and psychological impairments and who, because of the nature of their disabilities, are exceptionally incapacitated. They may be living in a helpless condition or be in constant pain and discomfort. Their disability might be causing loss of enjoyment of life and could even shorten their life expectancy.

There are nearly 5,000 pensioners in Canada today who are classified in the 100 per cent pension category and the capacity of many of them to enjoy life is materially lessened as a result of their service-related disabilities. I would like to mention at this point that the philosophy or intent, of instituting additional allowances of this kind was shared by members of the Woods committee, the government's white paper and by all the veterans associations that appeared before the committee, and is included in this bill.