

War Veterans' Allowance Act

I come now to the question of absence from Canada in regard to affecting receipt of war veterans allowance. Although I will deal with this question more fully at the conclusion of these remarks I want at this time to observe that here again the minister simply followed what has been done with regard to the other social welfare legislation. In going only this far the minister has not gone nearly as far as he and his colleagues insisted should be done when they were in opposition as I will draw to his attention in a minute or so.

I have already mentioned the fact that the minister offered as an explanation for not referring this bill to a committee the desirability of getting these cheques out as soon as possible. I appreciate what he said in regard to war veterans allowance cheques not being issued more or less automatically as old age security cheques are because I realize that any change in the law as to the basic allowance or ceilings entails a great deal of work in calculating the amount to be paid to each veteran. But I also have no doubt that the officials of his department are already lining things up on the basis of the proposed amendments and I suggest that referring this legislation to a committee would not delay getting the cheques into the hands of the veteran very much if at all.

I received in the mail last night a copy of the submission to the Prime Minister (Mr. Diefenbaker) and the cabinet prepared by the Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League. This is a most carefully prepared submission and if a committee had been set up I am sure representatives of the Legion would have been glad to appear before it to adduce reasons for the position they have taken with regard to the various matters affected by the legislation. Looking at the situation as sympathetically as I can from the minister's viewpoint I fail to see why he did not agree to refer this bill to a committee where the positions taken by the various veterans organizations could have been presented to it. This could have been done without delaying the other business of the house. Dealing with the bill in the house with no reference to a committee means that it cannot receive the careful attention we all feel it deserves unless we are going to hold up other business.

Mr. Brooks: I do not want to interrupt the hon. member except to say that the president of the Canadian Legion told me only yesterday that they did not desire to have a veterans affairs committee this session; they did not think that it was necessary.

Mr. Tucker: I can understand the minister feeling that he should pay some attention to that, but in view of the fact that so many of their representations are not being carried out,—

Mr. Brooks: Not too many.

Mr. Tucker: —their requests are not being carried out, and in view of the fact that there is certainly a very real possibility of an election—I do not say it is justified by the situation, but judging by the remarks of the Prime Minister that an election may come at any time and the remarks of the Solicitor General (Mr. Balcer) in Toronto recently that we are in the midst of a campaign—I am rather surprised at the Canadian Legion not wanting to press for the things they ask for in their brief if they knew what a short distance in some respects the government was going in carrying out some of their requests.

Mr. Brooks: They are not as susceptible to rumours as members of the opposition.

Mr. Tucker: I hope my hon. friend is right because I think—the Gallup poll indicates it—that the vast majority of the people of this country expect the government to carry out some of their promises in regard to veterans, in regard to the position of the farmers—

Mr. Brooks: Hear, hear.

Mr. Tucker: —and in regard to these matters on which they made very specific promises to the people of Canada. I think they expect the present government, if in carrying out those promises they get the support of a majority in the house, to stay right here and do that job and not be looking—

Mr. Cardiff: We are doing that.

Mr. Tucker: —for a dissolution before they have done it. I am sure that is what the people of Canada want and it is perhaps what the Canadian Legion expects.

Mr. Charlton: They wanted it before.

Mr. Tucker: I am just wondering whether we should not pay some attention to what the Prime Minister said. He has stated on more than one occasion that an election may come at very short notice. What is going to happen in regard to the veterans if this happens? The things they have asked the government for could not then possibly be brought into effect until after the election was held and a session called after the election. I really wonder whether they realize what seems to be the thinking of some of the hon. gentlemen opposite. I hope that