

Pension Act and Other Act

Welfare has been trying to sell the people of Canada on the idea that an increase of 3.6 per cent in the basic pension is an increase. The Minister of Veterans Affairs is a wiser man. He knows that 3.6 per cent is not an increase, that it is the basic rates themselves that have to be adjusted. We welcome the commitment that has been made that this is to be done. Like all who took part in this debate, I insist that it be done with the least possible delay.

May I say again, as I have said at an earlier stage of the debate, that we are glad that this bill is so drawn that the cost of living increase to be provided in it will be obtained by all who draw any kind of pension that is under the responsibility of the Department of Veterans Affairs. There are the various pieces of legislation mentioned in the title to this bill as well as other pensions and allowances and we are glad that the scope of this bill is such that it will cover them all.

By the same token, it has been admitted by the minister that these increases are just for cost of living purposes, that they are not to be a substitute for basic increases. I insist that all the basic rates connected with all of these acts, must be reconsidered and brought in line with the proper basis that was accepted many years ago.

• (1630)

Again, Sir, may I say that something the government has done at this time we welcome enthusiastically. I use that expression despite the warning of the last speaker who suggested we should not give this government undue praise. We cannot do that. It praises itself so much that, even if we tried to match that praise, we could not do it. I still say that we welcome enthusiastically the provision, partly in this bill and partly in the order in council that is being obtained, which makes it clear that war veterans allowance recipients are not to be given their guaranteed income supplement by one department of government only to have that supplement taken away by another. That will not happen, although that has happened in the past far too often. Actually, it has happened so often that the mail I am now receiving from veterans shows that they expect this to happen again. It is difficult to convince them that this time that will not happen. As I say, it will not happen, and this is good. So, even at the risk of offending my friend, the previous speaker, I give the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Laing) a bouquet on this point. Mind you, I agree with the previous speaker that all this should have been included in the bill. This provision was not in the bill, and I think we can take some credit for what is to be done. After a few speeches had been made and after a few conferences had been held, the minister was able to say, "We will attend to this and do it by order in council." So long as that is done, we shall be satisfied.

Mr. Marshall: We helped the government.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): The motto of the opposition parties in this House is, "We help the government". After all, someone has to provide that help.

I support strongly the proposition that this business of guaranteeing the full benefit of escalation should be included in the statute. Since the guaranteed income supplement first came into being, the few cents added to the guaranteed supplement each year have also been passed

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

on to veterans receiving war veterans allowance, but only on the basis of an order in council passed every year. Why should we leave it that way? Why should there be any question about this? Why should we have to get up on the floor of the House and ask if the government is to do this year what it did last year? Now that escalation has been made a statutory annual proposition with respect both to the old age security and the guaranteed income supplement on the one hand, and war veterans allowances and other veterans pensions on the other hand, why does the government not say right in the statute that when these increases are granted, veterans are to get the benefit of both?

I gather that my friend, the previous speaker, pleaded that it is not good enough to leave this to the uncertainty of an order in council. The uncertainty of the government's acting on the matter is not good enough. I say, why not put this provision in the statute so that it will become a permanent proposition? We are happy to see that our veterans are to be accorded better treatment this time than they were accorded in the past. I hope word will go out to them to make it clear that this time they are to get both the increase they are getting in the guaranteed income supplement and the increase they are to get by virtue of the 3.6 per cent increase in their war veterans allowances. Since the government has done it this way this time, I hope this can be put on a permanent basis.

I again express the hope that the Department of Veterans Affairs will find it possible to include these increases in the cheques at the end of June. I understand there will be some difficulty here, because so many cheques have to be computed separately. Computing the old age security pension increase is easy. All the \$80 cheques will now increase to \$82.88. Also, in the case of the guaranteed income supplement, the increase for a single recipient is to be \$15, and for a married couple \$30 in every case. This amount is simply added to the amount being paid under GIS. So, this can be done quite easily with respect to cheques coming under the Old Age Security Act. I am told that with respect to veterans' cheques, the matter is more difficult, because so many individual computations must be made. My fear is that if at the end of June veterans get their increases in their old age security and guaranteed income supplement cheques but do not get them in the war veterans allowance cheques, they will wonder what has happened and perhaps think they have been misled in the assurance given to them that they are to get both increases. I am sure that there are enough computers around this place for doing this work, and enough mathematical experts could be obtained for doing these computations, so that if this bill passes through this place today and perhaps through the other place tonight, arrangements can be made for the increase for veterans to be in their cheques at the end of June.

I am about to sit down, Sir. I merely want to say a brief word on two other subjects which, I admit, are not included in this bill. However, I will have finished referring to them before you can call me to order. We who are members of the Veterans Affairs Committee are delighted that the House gave us a reference enabling us to hear the various prisoner of war associations. We are in the midst of hearing them now. I hope the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Canadian Pension Commission and the gov-