

indicates to me that the minister should reconsider some of the restrictions in the act which deny many veterans the appeal or satisfactory adjudication that they deserve. I refer to the "benefit of the doubt" clause. Much delay is caused by the fact that evidence has to be sought. In many cases widows are applying for their dead husband's pensions and it is impossible to find evidence. In many cases First World War veterans cannot substantiate that they are now suffering from conditions resulting from First World War wounds. Here, again, there are untold delays, to the embarrassment of everyone, because evidence cannot be found. We should look at the benefit of the doubt clause.

On March 7 I proposed a motion which dealt with 17 different anomalies which should be reviewed. I mentioned that it should be embarrassing that 58 years after the First World War we are still trying to clean up an act which has been in existence for so long. With all the expertise the minister has in his department, we should be at the point where the Pension Act is almost perfect. Last night I was reading a book entitled "Veneration for Valour". One sentence on pensions reads:

In Canada, since the time of the Fenian raids in 1866, the pension has been accepted as the basic reparation for injury or death in war.

It has been over the last 100 years that we have been dealing with pensions. I can only hope that we will get on with this backlog of applications and that every effort will be made to clean it up. As I have said, those applications still number 3,000.

We should consider the relationship between the Pensions Review Board, the Canadian Pension Commission and the Bureau of Pensions Advocates, because they are all related. One way the backlog could be cleaned up would be to follow the advice of a learned, interested veteran who indicates the following:

The Canadian Pension Commission admits there is a serious backlog in handling pension applications. A great part of this backlog is believed to be at the Entitlement Board stage, which requires a hearing in a city near the place of residence of the applicant.

Normally these hearings require three members of the commission. Section 72, subsection (2)(a) of the Pension Act provides, however, that the commission may designate one commissioner as an examiner to go to various localities in Canada to take evidence and hear argument respecting an applicant's case.

This can be done only where the applicant informs the commission that the place or time fixed by the commission for a regular Entitlement Board is not convenient.

It seems obvious that the use of examiners would speed up the Entitlement Board process and it is noted that the Woods committee recommended this procedure, where the commission ran into a serious backlog of cases.

● (1240)

The representation continues:

My understanding is that the Bureau of Pensions Advocates, which represents a large percentage of pension applicants, has not made use of the examiner procedure and I would like to ask the minister whether he would discuss this matter with the chief pensions advocate to determine:

- (a) Whether the chief pensions advocate considers that this procedure would provide an equitable means of handling pension claims; and
- (b) Why the chief pensions advocate has not encouraged pension applicants whose cases have been delayed to request a hearing before an examiner.

Pension Act

I also raised the question of the Pension Commission which is closely related. The "Veterans Canada" report says that as a result of changes in the act in 1971, anomalies were removed to ensure complete equality of status of male and female members in respect of rights and obligations under the act. I ask the minister and the House, what about the equality of widows about whom I and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) have been harping? I am referring to widows whose husbands were receiving a pension of less than 48 per cent. Mr. Speaker, I suggest that there is not equality in this area. For some reason, those concerned about the status of women do not know these facts.

I appeal to the minister to raise this matter in cabinet, to convince the cabinet that the question involves equality. At present there is lack of equality. The law at present is an anomaly and is discriminatory. We should correct this. We learned yesterday what it would cost to put right some of these matters. Back in 1917 we promised our veterans that they would never have to worry about being repaid for their sacrifices. I suggest that the people of Canada would be willing to accept an expenditure in this regard of between \$35 million and \$40 million.

We ought to consider that veterans in the category I have mentioned are greatly worried about what will happen to their wives and dependants after they die. That humane consideration alone dictates that there must be no more delays in introducing an amendment to the Pension Act which would include those widows. The recommendation of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs indicates the pro rata basis on which this can be done.

I now turn to the war compensation legislation, a subject which the hon. member for Edmonton Centre (Mr. Paproksi) brought to our attention in committee yesterday. We should have insisted including in that legislation veterans of the First World War, who are excluded. We neglected to include them, and for that omission I take some of the blame. I am sure the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre will agree with what I say. When the war compensation legislation was introduced and accepted we should have insisted on the inclusion of First World War veterans. I suppose I can use the excuse that the matter was not included in the terms of reference. We learned yesterday that there are only 200 veterans who would be affected and the cost of including them would be only \$200,000 per year. Certainly, the ranks of World War I veterans 83 years old and older will be thinning out. Their numbers are declining each year. The Pension Act was introduced in 1866, I think. I am sure that anything we can do to help out those veterans and apply humane considerations would be most popular and would meet the approval of people all across this country.

As I said previously, we have no quarrel with the bill. If I can be somewhat political, let me point out that in our policy paper of 1974 my party dealt with the question of pensions. Some people say that my party has no policy. I want the minister to know that a Progressive Conservative government would take immediate steps to provide additional administra-