

*War Appropriation—Army*

approach their cases in the spirit of assistance which the order in council intended. I have asked the chairman of the board, who is before me, with regard to Sydney, from which my hon. friend comes. There the dependent would have learned from the notice she received that her nearest local committee was located in Halifax; however, if he or she went to the Canadian Legion or to a welfare agency, they would be immediately put in touch with the committee. In this particular case there is a member of the provincial committee living in Sydney. Mr. Muggah is a member of that committee. I must say that I do not feel that we want to multiply organization too much. We want to be sure to get the meritorious cases, or those which are thought to be meritorious, presented to the board. The best test is that it has worked. It has not worked in the case my hon. friend speaks of, but as he realizes, that is not because of the organization of the board, it is because of the regulations to which he refers.

The provision is that if a man overseas is struck off strength because of being absent without leave, the absence having continued for three months, his pay is stopped and the dependents' allowance is suspended by the dependents' allowance board. The function of the dependents' board of trustees is to make supplementary grants, and there would be nothing to supplement where the dependents' allowance was suspended. Otherwise we would be giving a dependents' allowance to the dependent of someone who was not a member of the forces. The provision is that a man is struck off strength when he has been absent without leave for twenty-one days and his pay stops. But notwithstanding the suspension of the allowance, the dependents' allowance board considered that there should be some relief from the sudden suspension and they have adopted the procedure in overseas cases of making a new award to cover a period of three months to assist the type of case to which my hon. friend has referred.

I think what the hon. member has in mind is the possibility of the dependents' board of trustees considering the merits of a case like that. I do not think you can make a hard and fast rule. There might be a case in which you would say, "No, the dependents' allowance should not be continued any further even though the man has been absent only one month." There may be another case in which there were meritorious circumstances, where the character of the man was known and it was doubtful whether or not he had really intentionally deserted or gone absent without

[Mr. Ralston.]

leave. Different situations might also exist in connection with the circumstances of the dependents. There might be a case of extreme hardship and another case where, although there had been a considerable reduction in the income, the situation was not such as to justify the payment of a grant.

All I can say to my hon. friend is that it is only by bringing up these cases that they are called to our attention. Perhaps the existence of a type of case is established. I will study the matter with the chairman of the board and my colleagues to see if there is any possibility of making a rule which would fit the particular type of case to which my hon. friend refers. I am always afraid of trying to fit an individual case, because very often hard cases make bad law. If there is a type of case which has merit, I shall endeavour to see if it is possible to meet it.

Mr. DOUGLAS (Weyburn): We are particularly interested in those who are entitled to assistance from the dependents' board of trustees. The board should be in position to grant this assistance as quickly as possible. The case was mentioned the other day of a member of the forces who was seriously ill in a hospital and whose dependent made application to the office of the board to secure transportation. In the agricultural areas particularly this would be a slow process to be followed by a woman who had received a telegram that someone belonging to her was seriously ill. By the time she made application to the office of the dependents' board of trustees and obtained her transportation, it might be too late. Some time ago I sent to the minister a copy of a resolution which had been passed by a farm women's organization in Saskatchewan and which I thought was worthy of consideration by the minister and his department. The suggestion was that where a man was seriously ill and word was being sent to his dependent, a transportation warrant should be sent along with the telegram. One can almost take it for granted that if the dependent is a long distance away she is not going to have the necessary money from her dependents' allowance and assigned pay to meet these transportation costs. If she has to make application to the dependents' board of trustees it may take too long. She will either have to borrow the money to go, or not go at all. I wonder if the minister has given any consideration to the possibility of having the transportation warrant accompany the telegram that goes out to a dependent informing her that a soldier is seriously ill?