

*Pension Acts*

this Part, in an amount equal to the amount that would be payable in respect of that person under Part III of the *Pension Act* if, at the time of his death, he had been in receipt of a pension for a disability assessed at fifty per cent.” ; and

(b) renumbering clause 35 on page 41 as clause 36.

[English]

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this amendment is to extend to merchant seamen and to members of the Auxiliary Forces who were prisoners of war of the Japanese during World War II, the same special consideration as Hong Kong veterans are to receive under the relevant provisions of this bill.

In its present form, the bill provides that veterans who were prisoners of war of the Japanese for a year or more will be entitled to a 50 per cent disability pension if they have any assessable disability. This will also mean that at their death their widow will be entitled to a widow's pension. In addition, a widow's pension will be payable to widows of veterans who were prisoners of war of the Japanese.

The government considers that these important new benefits are entirely appropriate in view of the experiences suffered by the veterans of Hong Kong and of other far eastern operations. We are satisfied that those who spent up to four years as prisoners of the Japanese are in a unique category among veterans. The rigorous and debilitating conditions experienced by this group led to clearly identifiable disabilities not duplicated among other groups of Canadian veterans, and also led to obscure Asiatic ailments which medical experts have found almost impossible to assess.

In addition to these veterans there are a small number of persons who, as merchant seamen, or as members of the Auxiliary Forces, also became prisoners of war of the Japanese and suffered the same kind of hardship for periods of up to four years. The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs has suggested, and the government entirely agrees, that these persons should have the same pension benefits as the Hong Kong group. The amendment will give effect to this change.

I might add one technical point. The Standing Committee suggested that this amendment be included in the portion of the bill relating to the Pension Act. However, as the exiting legislation affecting the pension rights of these persons is embodied in the Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act, the amendment applies to the portion of the present bill relating to that act rather than to the Pension Act. The practical result, of course, is exactly the same: the effect will be that all Canadians, whether technically classified as veterans or not, who were prisoners of war of the Japanese for a year or more will be entitled to the same special benefits.

These are the explanations I have to offer in connection with this motion.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. William Knowles (Norfolk-Halifax): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see you had the choice of two Knowles. Thank you for recognizing me. We on this side of the House welcome the speed with which the minister

[Mr. Dubé.]

has brought in this bill for third and final reading. We intend to do everything we can to see that it receives a speedy passage. We are pleased to hear the amendment which the minister has proposed.

Before I resume my seat I intend to suggest two further possible amendments which I hope the minister will see fit to accept. Before doing that, however, I should like to say a sincere word of tribute to the hon. member for York-Sunbury (Mr. MacRae) who has laboured so long in the cause of veterans rights and privileges here in the House of Commons, having served on that committee during his whole life in Parliament. I especially appreciate his efforts, because on occasions when I was unable to be present in the committee he carried the ball for the Official Opposition. I should also like to pay a word of tribute to the hon. member for Nipissing (Mr. Legault) who presided with extreme fairness, good humour and a desire to get things done as speedily as possible.

The two amendments which I should like the hon. minister to find in his heart to make, concerns clause 59(3). Perhaps they could be best explained by reading part of a letter from the War Amputations of Canada signed by Mr. Chatterton. With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to put certain parts of that letter on the record.

Under the new legislation an Exceptional Incapacity Allowance may be paid to a small number of 100 per cent pensioners as compensation for special problems—including pain and suffering, and shortening of life expectancy.

Specifically, the offending proviso is contained in Clause 59(3) of the Bill, to the effect that this allowance may be decreased if pension authorities decide that the disability can be lessened by wearing a prosthesis. This could have the effect of reducing the allowance for severely-disabled veterans, should they attempt to overcome their disability by the use of artificial arms or legs.

• (3:10 p.m.)

This proviso is in direct conflict with a recommendation in the report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs of June 22, 1970, which proposed that such allowances be paid as of right, and included the statement: "This right will not be affected by the pensioner's means or his degree of rehabilitation".

The committee report was concurred in by the House on June 23, 1970. Bill C-203 contains many improvements in veterans' pension legislation. It is regrettable that the bill should be marred by the inclusion of this seeming imperfection.

Then, moving on a couple of paragraphs:

We believe that, in the main, this proviso would affect some 200 double amputation cases, whose allowance could be reduced by an average \$400 per annum (from \$1,200 to \$800). Thus, the additional cost of Bill C-203 if this proviso were deleted would be approximately \$80,000 per annum. Our concern, however, is with the principle, and the amount of added benefit to the seriously-disabled pensioner is of secondary importance.

We recognize, of course, the medical principle that a good fitting prosthesis can be of considerable assistance to an amputee. We must, however, give priority to the rehabilitation aspect, and it is our experience that incentive is often needed to encourage a severely disabled person to make use of artificial limbs. Hence, our objection in this matter is based on the simple fact that it will represent an economic penalty for the disabled pensioner who attempts to overcome his handicap. It will place him in a disadvantageous position in relation to his fellow pensioner who does not make the effort to use a prosthesis. The latter group comprises a small percentage of war amputees; also it is emphasized that in some instances the