

War Veterans Allowance Act

but who, through no fault of their own, did not do so. The veterans organizations appealed to our committee to consider these amendments. Probably, as I said earlier, I am remiss in not introducing them here today as a means of overcoming inequities in the present bill. However, bearing in mind the interest shown by all parties in speeding the progress of this bill to grant increases in war veterans allowances and in particular to clear up the property clause which has created hardships for so many veterans and their dependants, I shall not do so. It is possible I am a little naïve, but I feel the minister is sincere in his statement that the matter is being studied with a view to implementing these amendments at a later date.

The government House leader has indicated in the past two weeks that he would bring on third reading if agreement could be reached, in co-operation with all parties, to pass the measure quickly. On behalf of my party, Mr. Speaker, and with the agreement of the two other opposition parties, may I say we are prepared to put up only one speaker each. As an indication of the co-operation already shown between all parties, may I remind hon. members that the committee stage of the bill took less than one hour. This probably constitutes something of a record—I think this was confirmed by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), whose word must be accepted in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, if we are truly to fulfil our responsibility to the disadvantaged of our country, this is the time to show some human consideration to these citizens, our war veterans. Fifty years ago the government of the day told the veterans that the country owed them "a debt by right" to look after them in return for answering the call to defend Canada. This pledge was reaffirmed after World War II and again after Korea. Today, some fifty years later, we have yet to fulfil all our obligations and nobody on either side of this chamber can be proud that in the year 1973 we have yet to repay this debt completely. Unless we clean up the war Veterans Allowances Act, not only by passing the bill before us today but by implementing these changes I have proposed, the matter should ever rest on our conscience.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, there are other items in the overall Pension Act which hold as high a priority as the War Veterans Allowance Act. I refer to the recommendations in the Woods Committee report and, specifically, to the basic rate of pension. In 1968, the Woods Committee spoke of the need to establish a realistic basic rate of pension. Yet here we are, five years later, still waiting for the necessary legislation. I am aware of possible arguments that progress has been made during the years. Indeed, on behalf of my party, I complimented the government as well as the committee which studied the basic rates and produced most excellent recommendations. I can certainly say that since I came to Ottawa in 1968 excellent progress has been made. I say this from my experience as a member of the Veterans Affairs Committee.

All this makes me wonder about what has gone on since 1918. The minister himself has just arrived in Ottawa and I am sure he, too, must be wondering what has gone on in the last 50 years or so. I ask him to ensure that every effort is directed to producing legislation to implement the recommendations of the joint study report on the

basic rate of pensions, increasing that rate to \$4,529 a year for the single 100 per cent pensioner, with further increments for married pensioners and their dependants. I trust, too, the legislation will approve a formula for annual increases based on the increases in the average wage received by the five lower public service categories. Mr. Speaker, let me say on behalf of my party that we support Bill C-148 wholeheartedly. Let us continue to show that we who sit in the House of Commons can be human in our consideration for a most important part of our society, the deserving war veterans of Canada who are losing their faith in us because we have neglected them for too long.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, may I once again draw attention to the spirit of co-operation and goodwill which exists among all members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and our desire as members of that committee that this legislation receive its final endorsement in the House this afternoon? As a measure of the spirit of co-operation which obtains among us I can say on behalf of my good friend the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall) that he and I are glad the House is in session today so that we can proceed with this bill and get its benefits established as quickly as possible.

As we have made clear at earlier stages, any criticism that we have of this bill does not relate to the things it contains but, rather, to the fact that some most useful measures have been omitted. The bill before us provides for an increase in the amount of the allowance payable under the War Veterans Allowance Act. The precise details have, of course, been put on the record. The increase is good. It is also good that the ceilings on permissible incomes have been raised, and raised to levels which spare us the experience of former years when we saw veterans being given an increase on the one hand only to have it taken away with the other. In this case, veterans, both single and married, will receive at the end of April a larger net increase than civilians in receipt of old age security and the guaranteed income supplement will receive. We welcome this. We are also pleased with the removal of the property qualifications which have been in the War Veterans Allowance Act since it began. As I said on another occasion, one thinks of the many veterans, and of the many veterans' widows, who have suffered over the decades because of the existence of those property qualifications. We are delighted that they are being removed.

As the previous speaker indicated, there are a few things we would still like to see corrected in the War Veterans Allowance Act. The words of the minister today that I liked most were his words when he said he would like to make it clear that suggestions concerning other improvements to the Act had not fallen on deaf ears. Our experience of the new minister, even in these few months, has proven to us that he does not have deaf ears. I hope he realizes he has strong support in any negotiations he may undertake with others in the cabinet, with the officials in his department or, particularly, with the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury). We hope there will be further improvements in the act this session. I should like to make this point very strongly.

[Mr. Marshall.]