

would be a building for additional office space for members of the House of Commons. The Department of Public Works has had its people in there renovating it and getting it ready for occupancy, but already an argument has developed as to who is to be moving into the East Block.

Mr. Cullen: I wish there was no argument. I would be quite happy to go there if no one else wants to.

Mr. Knowles: I am not getting involved in the argument personally. I started off in this building a long time ago, and I intend to stay in this building for a long time yet.

Mr. Cullen: Until the next election.

Mr. Knowles: A lot longer than that. But it bothers me, although we have been told members of the House of Commons have priority over there, that that was the reason the building was taken over, that apparently some government people think it is up to the government to have first say as to who goes in there. Then, who start to rear their heads around here?

Mr. Nystrom: The senators.

Mr. Cullen: Do you mean the people from the other place?

Mr. Knowles: The senators, the people from the other place. Before there is a decision as to who is to go there, some people have started to move in already. I understand some ministers are over there and some other people have accommodation. I just do not think it should operate in that way. However, that is an example of action preceding the decision, and I do not like it whenever it takes place.

With respect to Bill C-13, hon. members will not be surprised if I say that I favour its general principle, but there is one instance of a removal from this city to another part of the country about which I am still unhappy. As I say, I agree with the general principle that offices of the Government of Canada should be in various parts of this country, that everything does not need to be congregated here in the national capital area. For example, we have the Mint in Winnipeg. I do not think it has done anything to the money supply one way or another that the Mint is out there instead of here.

An hon. Member: Do they mint coins of the same quality?

Mr. Knowles: My hon. friend questions the quality of the coins, but that is not because the Mint is out in Winnipeg. As I say, moving some of these departments out and giving different parts of the country the opportunity to have government employment in their areas is a good idea, and I support the general principle. However, before any department is moved, I think serious consideration should be given to its functions and to the question whether people will be affected adversely.

Decentralization

That is the feeling I still have about moving the Department of Veterans Affairs from this capital city. I think it should have been kept here. I think the nature of its operations and the accessibility of its branches and divisions in Ottawa is something which is important. I recognize it is too late to argue about that. The Liberal government that was in power in the Thirtieth Parliament decided that the move was to take place. The Conservative government that was in power in the Thirty-first Parliament endorsed the decision and decided to go ahead with the move of the Department of Veterans Affairs and its associated bodies to Charlottetown. Now the bill is before us, so it is an accomplished fact and there is no point in making further comments about that decision.

I rise to make a very strong plea that veterans not be asked to pay the price of this move. We had it brought out in the last meeting of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs that the backlog of veterans' cases—and I am referring to veterans who have disabilities and are seeking disability pensions—has increased in the last few months. We were given various reasons for that, such as the death of certain doctors, the difficulty of recruitment and so on. It was never said to us in plain language that it had something to do with the move of the department from Ottawa to Charlottetown, but most of us know it has something to do with that move. As I say, I am not trying to stop the move. There is not much point; it cannot be stopped. But in order to keep up with the service to which veterans are entitled, if it means more money will have to be spent, then let it be spent by the government and by all the people of Canada instead of making veterans pay the cost of this move. Every time a veteran's disability pension is delayed, an injustice is done to him. Even if he gets it down the road a bit, justice delayed is justice denied. If it becomes necessary to increase the number of people employed by the Canadian Pension Commission, the war veterans allowance board or the Department of Veterans Affairs itself in order to keep up the service to veterans, then let us increase that number of employees and let us provide the service they are entitled to receive.

I was pleased from an exchange today that it was made clear that the bill regarding veterans, and particularly their widows, will be brought in on Wednesday. Most of us knew that it was to come in some day this week in any case, but it is good to have it, to have it for sure and to get it passed into law on Wednesday of this week. But it is not enough to provide these things in the law, particularly in the Pension Act, if veterans will suffer delays in getting the awards to which they are entitled. The very real danger is that the transferring of the offices of all branches and agencies connected with veterans affairs to Charlottetown will have that effect.

I do not see my friend from Charlottetown who I believe intended to speak on this matter and perhaps be on the other side, but I say to him that I am not arguing either against the principle of decentralizing offices or that anything more should be done to try to stop this move. The Royal Canadian Legion and other veterans' organizations did their best. All