

Pension Act Amendment

The hon. member for Acadia (Mr. Quelch) was satisfied that the terms of reference of the committee would be wide enough to permit all matters relating to my department to come before the committee. I have already given assurance that such will be the case. In connection with his observations relating to the present procedure of reducing pensions of veterans of world war I when examinations show a reduction in their disability, I will welcome a full inquiry by the committee at the appropriate time.

In the meantime I should like to refer to a few figures relating only to world war I. I am sure these will be of interest to the house. These include the period from January 1, 1947 to January 1, 1948 and cover examinations in Canada, a few in the United States and in Great Britain. The figures are:

Pensions increased	2,274
Pensions decreased	147
No change on re-examination	2,913
Continued without change	64,402

Total existing pensions in force as at December 31, 1947	69,736
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During the same calendar year there were 191 new awards of pensions to veterans of world war I and 88 reinstated on pension, or a total of 279 new awards as at the end of the last calendar year.

In the course of his remarks the hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Green) quoted figures supplied by my department regarding the number of cases wherein the Canadian pension commission had ruled an award of pension was not indicated because the condition claimed for was ruled to be pre-enlistment in origin and not aggravated during service. In so doing he stated that these men were "taken into the forces as fit and discharged as unfit." His assumption in that regard is not quite correct. The majority were not discharged as "unfit," but were discharged on "demobilization." Full details in that regard will be readily available to the members of the special committee. Every Canadian who incurred injury or disease resulting in disability during service is entitled to, and will receive, compensation in accordance with the assessment of the degree of service disablement as provided for in the Pension Act. That is mandatory, the responsibility of the Canadian pension commission, and is a trust which I know they endeavour to discharge with sympathy and understanding.

The hon. member for Souris (Mr. Ross) asked about the report of the McCann committee. That report is available and was tabled in the house last Tuesday.

[Mr. Gregg.]

When the hon. member for Nanaimo (Mr. Pearkes) referred to the adjustment cheques he said: "Let us get them out now." I am glad to have the assurance of his co-operation in that regard. The staff of the pension commission and of the chief treasury officer who have worked long nights and hours of overtime in the preparation of these cheques will be gratified to know that their spontaneous voluntary efforts are so well appreciated. He also mentioned some widows and orphans of Canadian members of the ferry command "who are in much strained circumstances." I am advised all dependents were notified in writing of the provisions of part X of the Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act and I shall be pleased to have full inquiry made on behalf of any such case if the hon. member will send me the necessary particulars.

It was not my intention to speak at length, Mr. Speaker, but only to touch on a few of the major points relating to the bill which were brought out during the previous debate. As I stated at the close of that debate, "the record of *Hansard* will be studied and the points brought forward will be submitted to the committee." That discussion will not be limited. It may cover all phases of the Pension Act and of the various groups, merchant seamen, fire fighters, and so on, who are provided for in the Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act, which is subject, in many respects, to the provisions of the former act. I have pleasure, Mr. Speaker, in now moving the second reading of the bill.

Mr. G. S. WHITE (Hastings-Peterborough): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the members of the steering committee of the veterans committee have more or less arrived at an agreement whereby all parties in the house will make every effort to facilitate the second reading of this bill. As far as this party is concerned we hope that the debate will be limited to one speaker, but if other speakers rise that is, of course, something that we cannot control. I assure the minister that there will be no attempt on our part to hold up or delay the second reading, because we want to see the bill go forward to the veterans committee.

The main feature of Bill No. 126 is its provision for an increase in the basic rate of pension. Other clauses of the bill are of importance, but the one in which all members of the house are most vitally concerned is the one providing for an increase in the basic rate.

I presume, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Gregg) who has introduced and is sponsoring this bill feels that