

Pension Acts

needs of the province in so far as its veterans were concerned. This statement is strengthened by the fact that some 30 people are responsible for the administration of some 5,500 veterans and their dependents. It emphasizes my various appeals to the department to provide more help to seek out the many veterans who are being denied the assistance for which they are eligible, appeals which have fallen on deaf ears in the department ever since 1968. This means, as I have proved, that many Newfoundland veterans are still being denied their just and well deserved benefits.

The staff at the district headquarters in Newfoundland should be complimented on the way in which they handled the workload with which they are faced, especially when the Newfoundland district has a much higher rate of growth in WVA and CWA cases than any other of the 18 districts in Canada. I stress, Mr. Speaker, for fear of contradiction, the rate of growth. There are many other areas of shortcomings faced by Newfoundland veterans, not the least of which must be directed to the United Kingdom, causing delays of up to two years. This is a fact that even the Woods committee failed to realize, and deemed acceptable.

There are some 3,700 Newfoundland Foresters who served in World War II and, although they qualify for benefits under the Civilian War Pensions Act, recognition of their service must be reconsidered. I intend to make representations for them in future deliberations of the Veterans Affairs Committee.

To return to the national problem, Mr. Speaker, there are still many deficiencies apparent in the Pension Act to anyone who reviews the provisions which apply to the Veterans Land Act, Canadian Merchant Seamen, Canadian Firefighters and others who offered their lives during wartime. I feel sure that the Veterans Affairs Committee will face these problems in the same spirit of comradeship that was displayed in dealing with the amendments with which we are faced today. We must not forget, when we seek help for war veterans, the contributions that are being made and have been made over the years by veterans' organizations. Not only do they help those in need but they have made a distinct contribution to the youth of Canada—I refer mainly to the Canadian Legion—by contributing to the education and recreation of our young citizens.

I say again, Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times before, that if this government will remove the blinkers when we are struggling in frustration at our inability to instil a sense of national unity, it will be guided by the display of comradeship which is projected through veterans' organizations without regard for race, creed or religion, and only in a dedication to help one another. We need not travel to foreign lands to project an image that we are not able to live up to; so, let us stop and reflect on how we became great as a nation before it is too late. Let us look at the sacrifices of some one million veterans who offered their lives during past world wars to enable us to govern in peace and pride. Let us put some sincerity into our thoughts, so that every Canadian, wherever he lives, will be as he must be, provided with equal opportunity.

[Mr. Marshall.]

• (4:10 p.m.)

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, this is a very important bill. It has been a long time in coming. It includes many progressive steps that we, in this party, warmly welcome. I trust that the minister will not be surprised if I have a few critical comments to make as I go along, but I want our initial word to be one of appreciation that, at long last, we have Bill C-203 and that it will soon be on the statute books of Canada.

I should like to join with the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Dubé) in paying special tribute to the veterans organizations. I have in mind the excellent assistance they gave to us as we studied the Woods Report and the white paper in the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. Their principal spokesmen almost became members of our committee. They sat with us for hours on end. I think all members of the committee will agree that they were a tremendous help to us. The officials of the department were also helpful to us; but that is their job. They are supposed to be.

While we are in the mood to extend greetings, I should like to join with the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall) in paying tribute to the excellent work done by Mr. W. T. Cromb during the years when he was chairman of the War Veterans Allowance Board. We also wish to extend our congratulations to Mr. Donald Thomson, who recently was secretary to the Royal Canadian Legion but who has now become the new chairman of the War Veterans Allowance Board.

This reference to the War Veterans Allowance Board gives me the opportunity to note, as did the minister and as did the previous speaker, that the bill before us today is not the only piece of veterans legislation to be dealt with in this session. Indeed, we anticipate one or two more pieces of legislation that will come down very soon, namely, bills that will amend the Pension Act in so far as rates are concerned and a bill to amend the War Veterans Allowance Act as well. These are very important changes that must be made. Otherwise, this bill will have little meaning for many of our veterans. We have in mind the announcement the minister made on December 2, 1970. Like the hon. member who has just taken his seat, we feel, although we welcome any increase, that the amounts of increase thus far proposed are not adequate and it is most unfortunate that they have not been made retroactive. Asking our veterans who have already waited a long time for these increases to wait until the month of April, should not, we feel, be the position of this government and of a grateful Parliament.

I was sorry that the Minister of Veterans Affairs was not able to give an immediate and affirmative answer to the question I put to him during the oral question period this afternoon. It had to do with the increase in the guaranteed income supplement that will apply in January, February and March. One has in mind the fact that over the last two or three years, whenever this has happened, veterans who have been receiving both the war veterans allowance and the guaranteed income supplement have had the total amount of income they could