

Supply—National Defence

We had to pass some special legislation to bring the Korean war veterans under the Department of Veterans Affairs. I think the Canadian people are really interested in this question now and we should do something about it.

Mr. Churchill: In so far as the subject the hon. member for Timiskaming was discussing is concerned, the Minister of National Defence is quite correct in saying it comes properly under the Minister of Veterans Affairs. However, the Department of National Defence has an interest in this problem. I believe it is section 13(2) of the Pension Act, a very troublesome section in my opinion, which covers whether a man is on or off duty. I believe it has been very improperly interpreted over the years. I remember that during the time I was Minister of Veterans Affairs I tried to get this altered, but before that happened the public had different ideas about where I should sit in this house. The matter should be pursued through the Department of Veterans Affairs, and if a revision of the Pension Act comes up this year, then it should be dealt with. It is a very serious and important matter.

I agree with most of what the hon. member for Timiskaming has said. The Minister of National Defence, in this particular instance, is not responsible because it is not under his jurisdiction. There is a moral responsibility on the Department of National Defence to try to solve this problem.

● (7:30 p.m.)

Some years ago we tried to solve it by appointing a joint committee from Veterans Affairs and National Defence to see whether the insurance principle could be adopted, thus removing it from the Department of Veterans Affairs. That is the situation as it stands at the moment. Before this particular session ends I hope the house will make certain that that section is either removed from the act and responsibility placed on the Department of National Defence, or else it is so modified that there will be none of this disputation as to whether a man is on duty or off duty when he is obviously in uniform, under orders, and going from place A to place B. We could cite a dozen cases tonight—I have had them myself—where an injustice has been done to the survivors.

The Chairman: Order. The Chair has not intervened in the argument that has been going on for the last few minutes because it

recognizes that there is a relationship between the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Pension Commission. While at this time I should not like to make a firm ruling, I would suggest to the committee that this item would be more properly discussed under the estimates of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, I do not want to pursue the matter unduly, and I am not arguing that it does not come under the purview of the Canadian Pension Commission. I am wondering what the staff of the Department of National Defence has done and what they are prepared to do to see that this situation which has arisen is corrected.

I am quite willing to accept that it exists in some other departments, but this department is responsible for the service personnel of today. If we are not satisfied with the arrangements we make for them and we object strongly enough, then I think the situation will be changed. I am sure they have thought about this. In the case of peacetime personnel we are really buying service from the Department of Veterans Affairs. They cannot be veterans if they are providing service now, though they may be veterans through previous service. All the department is doing is subletting the responsibility it has to provide compensation for the injured and killed to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I am sure the department must be aware that when the type of accident to which we have referred happens, everybody on the base knows that Mary Jane is left with no support, and that she is put into a position into which she would not be put, had her husband not been killed. On the other hand, if her husband had been working in Toronto and had slipped on a bar of soap in a washroom and broken his neck, he would get compensation. There was a case in the mines concerning someone working from collar to collar, although it did not involve taking a shower. However, in the ordinary case compensation would be provided.

I hope the minister will tell us what he is going to do about this. Surely his departmental officials have considered the alternative of providing compensation out of the government treasury under a compensation act. It is very easy to sublet this responsibility, but if this is done I think there is an obligation to see that the right type of service is provided. I suggest it is of prime importance to many people that this be done.