

Instead, it put the proper figures in for 1973 but left in the bill the provision that the increases for the following years would be governed only by the rise in the consumer price index. As we all know, a gap developed which at times was as high as \$500 per year—in fact, more than that.

What the minister is doing by this bill is establishing again the actual dollar figure that represents the average take home pay of those five categories at the present time. We are back where we were in 1973; indeed, we are back where we were in 1920 or 1921 in terms of principle. Because the escalation clause in the act has not been changed by this bill, it means that next year and the year after the escalation will again just be the rise in the consumer price index. That will not create a problem for a year or two but three or four years ahead we will have to go through this all over again.

I hope we can do away with the necessity for doing this every four or five years by writing into the act the provision that the basic rate of the war disability pension shall be the average take home pay of those five categories, whatever that average may be. As I say, I hope we will get there some time soon, but for 1978 and 1979 the problem has been solved. We welcome this and we congratulate the minister.

As I said earlier, we had quite a bit of discussion about this in the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs even though we did not have the bill before us. I made one particular plea to the minister which I repeat now, and I know he will do his best about it. The way this legislation is set up, if a veteran is receiving a small disability pension so that he also gets something under the War Veterans Allowance Act, the bill will not benefit him. He will get an increase in his disability pension but the means test ceiling on the war veterans' allowance will cause that to be cut back and he will end up with the same total.

There are a few items which the War Veterans Allowance Board has found it can ignore for purposes of that means test ceiling, such as certain increases in old age security and the guaranteed income supplement. I urge the minister to take this up with the War Veterans Allowance Board and find a way whereby, in the case of veterans receiving the disability pension and war veterans allowance, they get the benefit of the increase instead of having it given to them with one hand and taken away with the other.

That will also apply to widows on war veterans allowance as opposed to widows on pension under the Pension Act. It strikes me that we do not need to do this by legislation; there is sufficient authority in the War Veterans Allowance Act. I urge the minister to do his best to resolve this issue and to do it before the increased payments come into effect on July 1.

The other thing I want to say has already been said by the hon. member for Norfolk-Haldimand. I repeat it, I underline it and I press it on the minister with every bit of parliamentary experience that I have. This business of a cut-off, such that a widow whose husband had only a 47 per cent pension gets no pension whereas the widow of the husband who had a 48 per cent gets full pension, is for the birds. There is no justification for continuing that provision, that 48 per cent cut-off rule. The

Pension Act

minister knows how strongly all of us in this House feel about it. We know the attention that has been given to it in his department. I realize that he has done well to get this much money out of the cabinet this session; we cannot look for the other measure next week. But I urge him to give everything he can to resolve this matter in favour of all veterans' widows.

● (1742)

My friend said that at the Legion convention in Edmonton the minister will boast about this and he will be thanked for doing it; but I can tell the minister that as sure as I am standing here at the Edmonton convention he will also be asked "What have you done for us lately?". They will start to say to him "Fine, you have done it with respect to the basic rate; it is time to solve this question with respect to the widows." I call upon the minister to put the same fight and determination into that battle that he put into this one. It is unfinished business that will not go away. We will stay with it until we win the fight. In the meantime we congratulate the minister on getting this bill approved by the cabinet. He will soon discover that, just as with the bill a little while ago concerning compensation for prisoners of war, this one will be passed by parliament very quickly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, I am also happy to participate in this short debate on consideration of Bill C-58, all the more so because it was remarkable indeed that the House has agreed to pass all stages of the bill so quickly. But it is a pity that the minister and his department officials took so long to draft such a simple and non complicated bill which will go through so rapidly. We want to suggest in saying so that all veterans as well as all members of this House were looking forward to such legislation. So, I think that the co-operation we have offered to the minister tonight should encourage the government and other ministers to follow the example set by the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) to introduce the legislation we ask for a lot faster than is usually the case.

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that disabled veterans have been waiting for the increases contained in this bill because these people are suffering as well as their fellow Canadians from the impact of inflation. As most of them are in no position to earn any income, they must keep pace with price increases and inflation, and I think that the increase contemplated in this bill will be welcomed and that we should not stop there because unfortunately I am afraid that inflation is not about to stop.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will not dwell any longer on this subject but there is another point which I would still like to expand on and my colleague from Winnipeg North Centre has also dealt with it and it is the one with respect to veterans' widows. Recently I explained to the minister a problem which had been submitted to me by a widow in my riding who during one year—the year which followed the death of her husband—received a pension which was paid to her according to the law.