

am not certain that the act itself would allow sufficient latitude, although I am inclined to think it would. If it does not, having regard to the fact that the present situation is not in consonance with the desire of the house, the policy of the department, or the statute itself, the desire being to put the pensioners on a parity with those on civilian relief, I would suggest that, if it is necessary, a slight amendment be made to the act to enable that to be done. If the necessary power is already contained in the act I suggest that the regulations be extended to make this possible, because I can assure the minister from a number of cases with which I am reasonably familiar that because of this possible lack of specific provision in the statute there is a distinct hardship in a certain number of cases. Moreover it does create what we are anxious to avoid, that feeling amongst the returned men that they are not being dealt with on a parity with the civilian population; that instead of discrimination, if any, being in their favour as most of them think it should be, and as I believe it should be in that respect, it is against them. Of course I am perfectly aware that this has been carried on under this and other governments, that it has been the practice for many years, but at the same time it is not a practice of which I approve. The cost would be insignificant in relation to the good, both actual and physiological, that would be done by taking that wider and more generous view of the statute, and it would be worth while both as a matter of physical aid and in respect of the contentment of mind that would follow on the part of those so treated.

Mr. SUTHERLAND: That undoubtedly is the view of a great many, but the point is this: If these people are discriminated against it is not the dominion that is doing it; it is the municipality. These people did not lose all rights as citizens of the municipality because they went to the war. There is also this about it. In the two municipalities which my hon. friend mentioned, Calgary and Edmonton, I am informed that we are getting very few complaints. There were some in Calgary at one time, but now I understand the matter is being looked after there. There never has been any complaint from Edmonton so far as I have heard.

Mr. SPEAKMAN: I am very glad there is not, because it is not so very long since that a complaint was registered with me. They were not complaining as to the administration of the act. The officials were perfectly sympathetic. It was the policy that was complained of.

May I just suggest this to the minister? He is perfectly right in saying that these pensioners by reason of their being returned men have not lost their civilian rights. They still have all the rights of civilian citizens of the municipality, and the municipality might very well provide such medical care as is required. But the dominion government has taken over the responsibility not only so far as the men themselves are concerned, but in respect of rentals and fuel and food for their families. They have taken over the entire responsibility for the men and their families. I think they have taken the ground, and it is sound ground, that were it not for the condition of the men it is possible that they would be able to look after themselves and their families. That permeates our entire federal legislation with respect to the returned men—our pension law, our veterans' allowance legislation and most of our acts in relation to the returned men. The responsibility for the dependents of the returned men is included in the responsibility for the returned men themselves. That is in our pension act, where the state assumes the responsibility of paying not only a pension but an additional allowance for the wife and each of the children of the pensioner. Responsibility for the family is assumed as part of the state's responsibility for the man himself, and I suggest that it is not out of the way to carry that assumption of responsibility one step further in dealing with what is one of the most difficult features of the whole situation. As the minister very well knows, the difficulty arises partly from the fact that the pensionable disability bears but little relation to the entire disability. The pensionable disability frequently means the whole difference between employability and unemployability. That a man has a low rate of pension does not mean that he is suffering from that same degree of disability in the employment market. Having regard to all the precedents we have set in our federal laws in dealing with returned men and the interpretation which has been placed upon that responsibility, the minister would do well to consider this matter further.

Mr. MULOCK: A few moments ago I understood the minister to say that these vouchers were given out by relief officers. I assume he means relief officers representing his department and not the municipality.

Mr. SUTHERLAND: Yes.

Item agreed to.