

ment that veterans must have served in the United Kingdom for at least 365 days in World War I.

• (1620)

It is almost too late, but we still have time to apologize and amend the residence requirements of war veterans who live outside Canada. As indicated by many of my colleagues and myself on different occasions, the War Veterans Association of Britain has pleaded with the government to ease the regulations, especially for the elderly or disabled who decided to remain in Britain. There was little or no response, and we now have the opportunity to answer those pleas if the government wants to display some sincerity or by recognizing their sacrifice.

It is almost too late, but there is still enough time to review the Veterans Land Act for amendments to help provide decent accommodation for some of our veterans who still live in substandard housing and have no other means of applying for help, even though the department says otherwise. No, Mr. Speaker, I do not think that we should be in too much of a hurry to throw kudos to a government that each year pushes farther in the back of their minds the objectives of the Pension Act, which in the very first section refers emphatically to the debt that the people of Canada and the government of Canada owe for the sacrifice and disability of war veterans due to service to their country. None of us here should be too ready to give praise to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) for the nibbles he has given to the senior citizens and the veterans of this country, when the motives are so glaringly suspect.

No, Mr. Speaker, let none of us here get too complacent and accept with evident satisfaction that governments, past and present, have fulfilled their obligations to almost one million veterans, many of whom are still waiting after 52 years or even 27 years for a little more comfort because they returned from wars disabled. We may be discussing escalation clauses, whatever percentage it may be, but we should be dealing in a more meaningful way with human beings. We should be discussing with a little more feeling our failure to provide all that has been reasonably requested over the years by veterans' organizations on behalf of those citizens who in their youth went to two world wars and offered their lives on behalf of our country.

We become involved in wars, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, because of the weakness and ineptitude of those who govern. We should feel proud then, that we are able to sit in government and, with a sense of comradeship, regardless of political affiliation, deal with the problems of war veterans, ever conscious of our obligations. This bill could have done much more if those responsible for its content could have delved a little deeper in their consciences, and been mindful of the purposes of the Pensions Act.

In the interest of effecting passage of this bill, Mr. Speaker, it appears that veterans will have to wait a while longer. I sincerely hope that the Minister of Veterans Affairs and the government will take heed of the many weaknesses still remaining in the Pension Act and deal with them in the immediate future. If not, Mr. Speaker, it may be too late.

Pension Act and Other Acts

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I should like to give my support to the contention that has been made so effectively by the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall), that for all the good that is in this bill a number of things are not in it that ought to be. He has outlined these deficiencies extremely well and I hope that the government will pay attention to the plea that something be done soon with regard to the various matters to which my friend has referred, notably the reassessment of the basic rate of pension under the Pension Act, certain matters under the War Veterans Allowance Act and the whole question of dealing more favourably with prisoners of war, with the administration of the exceptional incapacity allowance and so on. As I say, the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe has stated this case very well and I imagine that I am not the only one following him who will want to be associated with what he has said.

The second thing I should like to say this afternoon is that whenever some of us make the plea that I made earlier today for substantial increases in the old age pension, there is always a member for Bruce around to ask "Where is the money coming from?" I tried to suggest, by way of an interjection, that our gross national product is over \$95 billion and out of that we could provide adequately for our senior citizens. The point I want to make now is that I do not think I ever heard that question asked in the midst of a debate on veterans affairs. All of us believe that the best possible must be done for our veterans and no one gets up to ask where the money is coming from. I must say that I have heard a number of ministers of veterans affairs take the same line, namely, that our obligation to our veterans, their dependants and their survivors, has to be met and that our job is to take steps to meet that obligation.

Having said those two or three things by way of introduction, Mr. Speaker, may I say the rest of what is in my mind at this point as briefly as I can. Like other members, I am anxious that this bill get through and get to the other place so that it can be passed and its benefits get to our veterans as quickly as possible.

As I said at the second reading stage of this bill, the statement of the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Laing) to the effect that the cost of living increase provided in this legislation is not to be regarded as a substitute for an increase in the basic rates, is very welcome. He noticed our appreciation immediately after he made the statement. He confirmed it at the end of the debate on second reading and also made it clear that he was speaking not just for himself as a minister who might not be with us much longer, but that he was speaking for the government. I think this is part of the reason for the plea that the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe has made, namely, that this commitment should be kept without delay, that there should not be another four or five years of study of the matter but that the basic rates should be put in line with the basis that was accepted when the Pension Act was first passed after the end of World War I.

I wish that the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro) would look at what the Minister for Veterans Affairs has said. The Minister of National Health and