

look back and remember what the French-Canadians were telling the Vichy French at that time.

● (1730)

It is a real honour and pleasure for me to take part in this debate. I know there are others who would like to speak, and that there are some who are not here today but who would like to speak on this bill. This is an effort of the House of Commons, not of any political party.

Mr. Jack Marshall (Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, I need not add many words to what has already been said this afternoon. I would only commend the minister and his staff, all the service organizations, and all members of the veterans affairs committee.

This bill will help those who are on partial pensions, those who may be in receipt of war veterans allowances through pre-aging; it will give them a few additional dollars to help compensate for the increasing cost of living.

There are only two or three points I wish to make now because of my interest in allowing others to take part in the debate. One concerns the clarification of compensation and pension arrangements. This is a subject to which we ought to address ourselves in committee. Suppose a war veteran is in receipt of war veterans allowance and will qualify for 10 or 15 per cent. How will that affect his war veterans allowance? There is nothing in the bill to say that it will not affect the allowance and therefore the extra money might be of no benefit to a WVA recipient who is already getting the maximum.

Second, take the case of veteran who is over 65 and who is in receipt of GIS. If he qualifies, will the compensation affect his GIS? Again this is a point to which we might well address ourselves in committee.

One of the good features, and this may have been overlooked, concerns the 48 per cent maximum for qualifying for widow's allowance. If the compensation is included, if the disability pensioner, for example, is getting 40 per cent and gets 20 per cent compensation it will bring him up over the 48 per cent line so his widow would indeed benefit.

As the hon. member for Norfolk-Haldimand (Mr. Knowles) and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) have pointed out, it is too bad that escapees were not included. It is obvious from the experience of those who escaped that in some cases they suffered more than those who were incarcerated in prisoner-of-war camps.

In closing I would once again commend the minister. He keeps us in suspense a lot but he always comes through in the end. I should congratulate him, his officials who do the detailed work, and all the members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, I have reserved to myself, I trust, possibly the last word other than those of the minister in reply. First of all, as I have indicated in the past, I have an interest in this legislation. It is possible I am the only one in this Chamber who has a personal and direct interest in it and for that reason, of course, I have had to lie back at times and let others get to the forefront on this particular issue.

Veterans Affairs

I recall private legislation going back eight or ten years, trying to get ministers of veterans affairs subsequent to myself—predecessors of the present minister—to look at this situation and bring the men in for treatment. It was not so much that I was interested in monetary compensation as it was to get the men in and study the effects of what everyone has been speaking of, but from a medical point of view. There would have been many other benefits. I did not think solely of my confreres in the prison camps whether of Dieppe vintage or whether of longer-term Navy or Air Force personnel; I was considering primarily the non-Hong Kong or non-Japanese prisoners of war.

I was not happy about the settlement reached with regard to the Hong Kong prisoners. There is one fundamental point which has been lost sight of, as is evident from the restrictions in the bill before us, and it is that we have since the first world war granted war disability pensions up to 100 per cent in compensation for war wounds or injuries arising out of war service. It is inviolate, not subject to tax, not assignable, not attachable. In certain cases survivor benefits accompany it.

As far as Hong Kong people are concerned, unfortunately there was the 50 per cent ceiling put on which mingled both disability and compensation for the privation they had suffered. It was unfortunate it was done that way, and I believe it was right of the departmental officials on this occasion to insist that the question of POW compensation be taken out of the service disability legislation entirely and that it be recognized as POW compensation. I must say, though, I find it disappointing, even though I realize and speak with gratitude on the part of thousands of my colleagues who were prisoners of war that this action should now be taken. But I do find that having recognized the injustice, the inequities which were imposed on Hong Kong prisoners of war who were really entitled to between 75 per cent and 80 per cent disability pensions, they were cut by the 50 per cent or else they gave up the 50 per cent.

If they were in receipt of a disability pension in excess of 50 per cent there was no compensation for the Hong Kong veterans category. That is a matter of fact and that was where the rub came. I know some prisoners of war who are 90 and 100 per cent pensionable. They made the sacrifice and the country gratefully granted them this disability pension. Now, when we go on the other side and deal under another heading entirely with prisoner of war compensations, this legislation unfortunately tells those men that if they have, both in the Hong Kong category and in the non-Japanese POW category, a disability pension of over 50 per cent their compensation is going to suffer and that if their compensation were upgraded as a result of a re-board in future their compensation will go down. This is because the limit under the act is 100 per cent.

I have spoken to the minister privately about this, and in committee I hope we can agree that the continuation of this inequity should be removed. There is one head of compensation. There is another head of disability benefit. Surely we are not going to continue this inequity to the bitter end. No man will get in excess of a 100 per cent disability pension. He will get a 100 per cent disability pension if he is entitled to it; he will then get, in addition, compensation for being a prisoner of war.