

War Veterans Allowance Act

number of days of service in the United Kingdom. The question of the cut-off date arose. As time goes on, people say: That should be shifted. I think it is only right that it should be shifted with changing conditions. I well recall that we took a good look at the survivors of the South African war. I remember saying to my officials: The survivors of that war are in their eighties and nineties; let us relax the regulations as far as they are concerned, and at least give them a few years of happiness if we can provide some assistance for them. And we did. We were able to assist some of them. Yet under the terms of the act as it stood, they did not qualify.

Now we have reached the stage where the average age of those who served in the first world war is 71. These men are a vanishing race. Some of them, who volunteered for service and who, through no fault of their own, did not reach the theatre of war in France, or who, again through no fault of their own, were in Britain for fewer than 365 days, perhaps require a little more attention than has been given to them up to the present time.

I am not sure that the bill as presently drafted may not need some modification. It is perhaps the type of bill the subject matter of which should be referred to the committee on veterans affairs. Unless this is done it will lapse and this particular problem will not receive the attention it deserves. It will not receive the attention it deserves because the spokesman for the government, the hon. member for Chambly-Rouville (Mr. Pilon) raised the usual objections which come from officials. He said it would be difficult for the department to administer; that it would be hard to determine the number of people who might qualify.

Well, all these difficulties can be overcome. The records are there; they just have to be searched. They show when a man enlisted, how long he was in Canada and how long he was overseas. They have been carefully kept and this is not an insuperable job at all. I was amused to hear the objections which emanate from officialdom. I do not mind the officials raising the objections; that is their job. They have to point out to ministers and parliamentary secretaries the difficulties in the way of new legislation, and they are responsible for showing that these difficulties exist. But as far as the government is concerned, it should deal with these difficulties and take the necessary steps to put some new measure into effect, if it is found as a matter of policy to be worth while.

[Mr. Churchill.]

I think that a bill of this nature is commendable and that the subject matter should be carefully studied. A spokesman for the government might have undertaken to do this. The parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Carter) is present, and, given the chance, he might have said earlier that his department intended to consider this question and, perhaps, bring in some amendments later in the year. If on the other hand the department intends to do nothing, then the subject matter should be referred to the standing committee on veterans affairs. Let them have a go at it. Officials could be called in to indicate the problems which arise and others could, perhaps, show how these problems could be overcome.

I was glad to hear the hon. member for Comox-Alberni (Mr. Barnett) and the hon. member for Medicine Hat (Mr. Olson) indicate their approval in principle of this measure. They paid their respects to those who have served abroad, and I think Canada generally has been appreciative of those who have volunteered to serve abroad in the defence of freedom. If they are older people, now, I think it is within the capability of the committee to say whether something might not be done for them.

I raise just one question before I sit down. I wonder whether it would be advisable to make a strictly proportionate estimate of the amount of money which might be paid. Perhaps an easier rule of thumb could be introduced in this regard, because you might get 201 over 365 for one man and 59 over 365 for another. I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that it might be simplified by being divided into three parts, or something of that nature. Even that eventually would not satisfy everyone, but it would remove part of the difficulty of having to deal with, say, 500 people each one having a different percentage of entitlement. However, that is something the committee could decide. I would like to express my approval of the bill, and if it comes to a vote I shall certainly vote in favour of it.

Mr. H. C. Harley (Halton): Mr. Speaker, I would first of all like to commend the hon. member for Swift Current-Maple Creek (Mr. McIntosh) for bringing this matter before the house. I certainly agree with the principle of his bill. However, I agree with the hon. member for Comox-Alberni (Mr. Barnett) that he does not go far enough in his bill, and because he does not go far enough it is going to give rise to difficulties that have not been