

On December 10, not many weeks ago, I asked the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) a very specific question. I asked him whether the necessary arrangements were being made so that veterans 65 years of age or over who were receiving both old age security and the guaranteed income supplement on the one hand, and the war veterans allowance on the other, would get both the escalation payments due in January, the one on the OAS-GIS being quarterly, and the one on the WVA being annually. The minister's answer on December 10 was that those arrangements were being made.

On January 3 I asked again whether arrangements had been made so that those veterans 65 years or over would get the escalation in both parts of their income, and the answer was: "Yes, those arrangements have been made" Things have not worked out that way.

What has happened is that veterans 65 years of age or over who are in receipt of both OAS-GIS on the one hand and WVA on the other got the January increase in their OAS-GIS, and fortunately they were allowed to keep it; but their war veterans allowance stood at precisely the same level with not one cent of an increase. The promise made to me by the Minister of Veterans Affairs on December 10 and January 3 was not reflected in the order-in-council that was passed or in what happened to the veterans themselves.

So while we boast about the fact—and the government does this all the time—that at least those who are in need or on fixed incomes are getting an escalation of their incomes in accordance with the rise in the cost of living, here are veterans, of all people, 65 years of age and over, and veterans' widows, whose income is made up in the main of two elements, OAS-GIS on the one hand and WVA on the other, and who are receiving the escalation on only the OAS-GIS portion. In other words, the cost of living may have gone up three or four percentage points during a certain period of time, but they receive a three or four percentage point increase on only a portion of their income. In other words, they are being shortchanged. I dislike shortchanging being perpetrated on any of our people, indeed on any of our retired people, senior citizens, railway workers or any others, but I think to shortchange our veterans 65 years of age and over and veterans' widows is really incredible and unthinkable.

Those on disability pensions, if they have enough that they do not have to fall back on war veterans allowance, of course get the full percentage increase in their disability pensions. If they are over 65 years of age and are getting both a disability pension and old age security, they get the escalation on total income. But this special group of people in particular need, the burnt-out veterans, the veterans who cannot prove that they were actually hurt or disabled in a conflict but spent their time in overseas service, do not get the escalation on their full income because of the faulty way in which that order in council was drawn.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the member but his time has expired.

Some hon. Members: Carry on.

Mr. Bell: Carry on for another 10 minutes.

The Address—Mr. S. Knowles

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Does the House agree?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I shall only be a few minutes longer. Before you found it necessary to draw my attention to the passing of time I was pleading that this sort of shortchanging of people, retired persons in particular, is a crime in any area. But I think it is particularly pernicious when it happens to veterans, and especially when it happens to veterans who are in that group known as burnt-out veterans and are the recipients of war veterans allowances.

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In a month or two there will be another increase in the old age security and guaranteed income supplement. It will not be very much this time. That puzzles me. It seems to me that the cost of living is going up much faster than these increases are. But I suppose they will get that increase in their old age security and guaranteed income supplement and the Department of Veterans Affairs will say to us that the veterans got an increase, so what are we complaining about. What I am complaining about is the hypocrisy of the government boasting that they are indexing the incomes of those who are in need—pensioners, those on fixed incomes—not just by 2 per cent but by the full amount of the cost of living. The fact is that there is one particular group for whom this is not being done and it is this group of veterans who are in receipt of war veterans allowance and are over 65 years of age.

I dislike the fact—and I protested it with my colleagues in all parties when this proposal was brought in—that these persons were forced to go on the guaranteed income supplement, that they were not permitted to draw the full amount of their assistance from the funds of the War Veterans Allowance Board. At any rate, that was done and we are stuck with it, but I do plead that this be looked at again.

Perhaps my main reason for mentioning the fact that a change is coming in April is to recognize the fact that when that change comes another order in council will be necessary to permit these veterans to keep the increase that they will get in old age security and guaranteed income supplement. I call upon the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) to persuade his cabinet colleagues to correct this situation. I think that is where the trouble is. I do not think it lies with him. I think he has the interest of the veterans at heart, but he has colleagues who think of veterans as welfare recipients on whom they can cut down a bit and save money. I hope he will persuade his colleagues that when the order in council is written in April to take care of the next increase in old age security and guaranteed income supplement, it will be drawn in such a way that these veterans will be permitted to get the increase in the war veterans allowance that came into effect in January but which they did not get.

While the minister is dealing with his cabinet colleagues on the whole question of the war veterans allowance, I hope he will also impress upon them very strongly the request by veterans for the removal of the March 31 deadline on the Veterans Land Act. There are only 31 days