

War Veterans' Allowance Act

The case I wish to bring to the attention of the parliamentary assistant to the minister is the case of a veteran who is married but owing to very unusual circumstances which I do not wish to mention here has had to live away from his wife. He has maintained her throughout the years but under the act, as it now stands, because he is not living with his spouse he will be paid war veterans allowance as a single veteran. Now I am just going to quote his letter:

Many thanks for sending along the war veterans allowance forms. I promptly filled them out, witnessed by a J.P. and sent them off to Vancouver. They acknowledged receipt of them and a few weeks later their representative called in to see me to get a little more information. More than anything he wanted me to clarify my marital state, as I had stated on the form that I was married, but my wife had not signed the form, nor was any statement of her financial status. I explained to him that on my side of the form I had stated that I was not and had not been living with my wife for years, though I had and still am supporting her. He told me then, that that statement definitely put me into the single class, because the act clearly states that a married man must be living with his wife.

And then he goes on to say he cannot understand this discrimination and asks that something should be done about it. I mention this case as only one of several of a similar nature with which I have met during my experience as a member of the house. Here is another rather unfortunate case. As far as this man is concerned he is maintaining his wife under very unusual circumstances. He is a very fine type of old soldier, a pioneer settler who came from the old country in the early days of this century, went over in the first world war and had an exceptional military record. Just because of the present wording of the act he is not allowed to receive war veterans allowance as a married man.

I do urge the minister to give consideration to an amendment to the act whereby a veteran who has separated from his wife because of unusual circumstances, but who is still maintaining her, be allowed to receive war veterans allowance as a married person.

Now I have very little more to say at this time. I do not wish to detain the house too long since I know there are other members who have a few words to say on this very important legislation. I must say, however, that I am heartily in agreement with the increase suggested in order to bring the salaries of these officials in line with other officials of similar status and I am very pleased to see that provision included in the bill.

I also wish to draw to the attention of the parliamentary assistant that I realize that it is going to create an immense amount of work for the staff of the Department of

Veterans Affairs and that a good many of them will be working overtime in order to see that the veterans and dependents concerned receive the benefits of this legislation as soon as possible. I do suggest to the minister that these good people who put in these extra hours of labour to bring these benefits to their comrades should receive every consideration around Christmas time and have their holiday extended.

One more suggestion: we are so constantly amending veterans legislation that it is almost impossible to be fully informed on the facts unless one has a consolidated copy of the act. Would the minister be able to have a consolidated edition of the War Veterans' Allowance Act published by the Queen's Printer at the first opportunity? I ask this because this is one of the acts that a member always needs to be able to pull out of his brief case and consult, together with the Pension Act, the Unemployment Insurance Act and so on. One has to carry these things about because one is so frequently asked questions regarding them, and I do want to suggest to the minister that he should make it possible for us to have a consolidated copy of the act at the first opportunity.

While this legislation only goes part of the way—I think I should be safe in saying it goes about three-quarters of the way in the direction the Legion would like to go—we are very pleased to see it placed before us at this time. The measure has our most hearty support. It will improve the living conditions of a good many of our comrades and provide benefits for a good many others who are being overlooked today, and I am sure, in general, it brings a further measure of justice to the veterans and their dependents who have served this country in the days gone by.

Mr. F. G. J. Hahn (New Westminster): Mr. Speaker, we in this group also, support the principle of the bill. We recognize it is a definite step forward and that it will prove of considerable assistance to veterans as a whole. While we recognize that it does not go quite as far as we would wish, we are also aware that we cannot expect Conservative legislation to be perfect no matter how good the intention might be.

We do recognize, though, that this is a step in the right direction. The minister and his parliamentary assistant have long been members of the committee on veterans affairs and have from time to time been outspoken on matters dealt with by this particular legislation. They have said a great deal in the past and many of their utterances have been