

in all cases. Some of these men, who may not be satisfied with a 50 per cent pension, might wish to come forward and show that, for instance, they have aged prematurely as a result of their war service, or that a heart condition is related to their deprivations while in captivity. It would be difficult to prove that this is not the case, and we shall welcome veterans who wish to come forward to present such claims.

Mr. Speaker, I realize there are others who wish to take part in the debate. I thank the Chair for allowing me to stray from the mere monetary considerations of this bill and I thank the House for its attention.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Caouette (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say only a few words on Bill C-208 entitled "An Act to amend the Pension Act, the War Veterans Allowance Act, the Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act, the Children of War Dead (Education Assistance) Act and the Department of Veterans Affairs Act to provide for the annual adjustment of pensions and allowances payable thereunder."

I will only state that for many years, under the previous administration and under the current administration, we have been requesting a better treatment for our veterans of both world wars.

We know that veterans did not obtain the attention they deserved from the government. And for many years one of our colleagues, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), has been fighting to improve the plight of veterans and all those living on fixed pensions.

While the cost of living index rose sharply over the last few years these pensions remained stationary. Bill C-208 provides for the adjustment of pensions to the cost of living index on a retroactive basis to January 1, 1972. We heartily welcome this bill which, even though still imperfect, will nevertheless give special consideration to our veterans because all of us in this House have received representations from veterans complaining about their inadequate pensions which are not a privilege but a right.

War veterans were promised during the war that once they returned to Canada, they would never again know poverty depression and problems such as we had faced during the depression. But we were practically on the verge of such a crisis with the kind of pensions that these people were receiving.

I hope that these pension increases will substantially help our veterans and their families. Indeed, the bill makes provision for their children's education and for their widows.

Mr. Speaker, we believed that this legislation would be included in the program advocated for many years by the Social Crediters. All these bills relating to old age security, war veterans and needy mothers pensions and so on would have been integrated in a comprehensive program applicable to Canada as a whole with the consent of the provinces.

• (2030)

I can hardly see how a province could have objected to the implementation by the federal government of a com-

Pension Act and Other Acts

prehensive program whereby all Canadians, war veterans or otherwise, would have been treated equally.

At any rate, Mr. Speaker, we are happy that this bill has been introduced. As I said earlier, we have been asking, time and again that war veterans receive better pensions for themselves and their families, have easier access to property by helping them, for example, to build their own houses or acquire farm lands should they wish to settle on farms, in order to show them that we take into account the fact that they had entirely dedicated themselves to the defence of their country, Canada.

Therefore, we are quite glad that the government thought of the war veterans and their families. We support this increase in veterans' pensions.

Hon. Martial Asselin (Charlevoix): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to say a few words on this bill.

As I pointed out on the night the budget was brought down when reference was made to legislation designed to increase the old age security pensions and veterans allowances, the official opposition has been asking for an increase in old age pensions and veterans allowances for the past three years.

When I mention the official opposition, I think I would be unfair if I did not point out the efforts also made for the past three years by my colleagues the Créditiste members from Quebec when we asked for a substantial increase in old age security pensions so that the latter would reflect the increase in the cost of living.

As the hon. member who spoke before we was saying, our senior citizens were the pioneers, the people who built this country, who through their efforts, their energy and their labours built the society in which we now live.

I feel it is unfair for the government to choose a time when an election is forthcoming to say to senior citizens: We are at last thinking of you and we are granting you a substantial pension increase—very substantial indeed—\$2.88 per month.

We also know that the system is going to create a degree of selectivity. This means that not all senior citizens are going to receive this monthly increase of \$2.88, but only those which the establishment and public servants will select on the basis of criteria established through cabinet orders and regulations.

Mr. Speaker, obviously we support this increase in old age pensions and veterans' allowances. I would like, however, to take this opportunity to raise the veil on a conflict which exists at present between the federal government and that of the province of Quebec. Everybody knows that at the present time in Quebec we are going through extremely difficult circumstances that were not caused by the federal government. As a Quebecer, I cannot ignore the Premier's outcry against the federal government last Sunday, on television.

It has been claimed, Mr. Speaker, and the right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) indicated it this afternoon that there was no conflict between Quebec and the federal government with respect to income security. In the meantime, an outstanding member of the Quebec Government, Mr. Castonguay, minister of Social Affairs, threatened to resign last week when he stated that the federal govern-