

Pension Act

House when they have brought to them specific problems related to their department. I think I can say on behalf of those members that we certainly appreciate that. I also echo the sentiments of the minister when he praised the men who gave so much for their country, and I pay tribute to the people on this side of the House who have pressed the minister and his government to get this legislation in the form in which we have it. I pay tribute to my predecessor as the critic here on our side of the House, the former member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe, who gave a great deal of his time and effort to do this, and to my colleague, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), who joined often with the member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe to press the minister to do this.

Personally, I know that the minister has wanted to see this legislation passed for a long time. He is a veteran who gave a lot of himself in the cause of Canada, and it is not always his fault that we do not have the legislation when we want it. We hope, however, we have helped him in persuading his cabinet to see the light of day and put us where we are now.

There are one or two concerns I would like to express about this bill. One is the fact that there is no provision in it for an annual review of the right to a disability pension. When the legislation was first introduced it was thought that indexing according to the consumer price index would keep the basic rate of pension in line with the five categories of unskilled labour in the public service, but as experience has shown, that has not happened. There is a very distinct possibility that in the years ahead we will find ourselves in the same situation we are in today. I would have thought it not beyond human ingenuity to include a clause to ensure that the basic rate of pension could be reviewed perhaps on an annual basis, and certainly on a biennial basis, to see that it keeps up with the categories I have mentioned.

● (1732)

Mr. Speaker, this gives me an opportunity to express concern and hope that the government in their review, which the minister assures us is always before them, will find some means of giving the survivor's pension to widows of pensioners who received a pension of less than 48 per cent. I know there are a few who receive benefits if the death resulted directly from war injury, but there are a great number who, when the veteran dies, if his disability pension was less than 48 per cent, are simply cut off.

We have asked for this over and over again. In committee yesterday and this morning the minister assured us that the matter was under review. He cited the cost to the Canadian taxpayer as one of the reasons why it is not being done. Mr. Speaker, when you look at some of the frivolous grants that are sanctioned by this government, it is hard not to believe that some of the money could be passed on to more worthy causes such as those I have mentioned here. I know the minister has this matter well in mind and we give him our pledge of support if in the next few months or in the next year he brings in a bill

[Mr. Knowles (Norfolk-Haldimand).]

to correct the situation, which will get the same speedy passage as the bill before us this afternoon.

There are many other issues we could talk about today, Mr. Speaker, but on this side of the House we have given an undertaking that the bill will be passed within the hour. I wish to see that happen so I will not take up the other issues at this time.

The convention of the Dominion Command of the Canadian Legion will take place soon in Edmonton. I know that the minister will go to the convention and tell them what we have done for the veterans by passing this bill. I hope he will give some credit to the opposition for this because we have worked very hard to get it through. We will support him if he says that!

That is all I have to say, Mr. Speaker, and we hope for very speedy passage of this bill.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, there are times when in a particular way this parliament speaks in the name of the Canadian people. I suggest this is one of those occasions. It is good that we do not forget the sacrifices made by our veterans and the suffering that many of them still endure. I am glad that despite the passage of time we do not forget our veterans, and that today we are responding to the request to restore the basic rate of war disability pension to the level calculated by the formula agreed to in 1973.

Like my colleague and namesake who has just spoken, we in this party have been very anxious to get this bill and we are pleased to get it, so we have no intention of taking up time at this stage. We are prepared to go through second reading very quickly, put it through committee of the whole and give it third reading before we rise for the dinner hour.

The minister has paid tribute to those who helped him get this legislation—to members of parliament of all parties. We are aware that he has needed a good deal of help because of some of those he has to deal with in cabinet. Even though we attack him and criticize him at times because things seem to move so slowly, I think he deserves our commendation for having got out of his cabinet colleagues additional money to bring pensions up to the amount indicated in this bill.

I join with the hon. member for Norfolk-Haldimand (Mr. Knowles) in commending also the Royal Canadian Legion and all the organizations that are part of the National Council of Veterans Associations of Canada for their persistent campaign, particularly since last fall. I know they are delighted that the campaign has been successful.

Like the hon. member who just spoke, one or two things about the bill leave me less than satisfied but not to the point of wanting to hold it up. I still say that in 1973, when it was agreed to put the basic rate of the war disability pension at a level equal to the average take home pay of five categories in the public service, that provision should have been written into the bill so that each year, as that average take home pay increased, the basic rate of pension would have increased accordingly. The government did not see fit to do that in 1973.