

*Pension Act and Other Acts*

It would seem that the claim of the veterans' organizations, which is to the effect that the government is obligated to overhaul the basis of payment of war pensions to bring them in line with the rate for unskilled labour, is an extremely valid one. Since 1965, the government has approved three increases which appeared to have been based on the rising cost of living, but did nothing to bring the pension closer to the pay of an unskilled labourer in the federal public service.

Within recent months the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Laing) has received lengthy submissions which indicate a great deal of research on the part of veterans' organizations, all of them proposing an increase in the basic rate to the aforementioned figure of \$4,550 per annum. These veterans' organizations are much disturbed, and rightly so. The increase in war pensions of 3.6 per cent was announced at a time when they were awaiting a reply to their serious and well-documented requests to the government for an increase in the order of 30 per cent, which would have given the 100 per cent pensioner parity with unskilled labourer. The government's announcement made no reference to anything which might be done to close this considerable gap which successive governments have allowed to develop. It, therefore, seems that if it is the government's intention merely to take the basic rate of \$3,504 and subject this to annual or biennial fluctuations in keeping with the cost of living, it will have effectively robbed the 100 per cent disabled veteran of approximately \$1,000 a year.

I submit to the minister that since 1919 there has been an implied contract that the 100 per cent pension would be aligned with earnings in the unskilled labour market. No matter what indicator is taken, no person in his right mind could suggest that such earnings today are below \$4,550. It seems to me that the veterans' case is a reasonable one, and I sincerely hope the government will assure veterans that the 3.6 per cent increase is another interim measure, and that there will be no undue delay in the government bringing a further measure before the House to place the basic rate of pension on par with the junior grades in the federal public service.

The minister said last Friday, as recorded in *Hansard*:

I want to say clearly that this question of basic rates is under careful study.

How many more studies could possibly be done when the matter has been studied almost to death already? Another of his statements with which I have to take issue is the following:

Another matter of considerable interest in this connection is the question of how the current increases under the Old Age Security Act will be treated for purposes of War Veterans Allowance. I am pleased to announce that the government intends to seek an authority from the Governor in Council for a regulation exempting these increases under the Old Age Security Act, so that they are not treated as income when computing entitlement under the War Veterans Allowance Act.

I understand that an order in council has now been signed to that effect. However, I wonder why an amendment could not have been included in either Bill C-207 or Bill C-208 to have this matter corrected. Whoever drew up this bill must have had a short memory or did not have too much influence, and whoever authorized it in government must also have a short memory. How much more

[Mr. Marshall.]

time must we spend in waiting to repay the veterans of our country, other than in a piecemeal fashion? After 27 years, the government fiddles with the lives of our Hong Kong veterans who have submitted millions of pages of briefs giving proof of the effects of inhumane treatment which it is distressing to repeat.

New evidence was presented as late as April, 1972, giving proof of the effects of stress from the Japanese concentration camps which accelerates aging. The request was made that the Hong Kong veterans so afflicted be considered for 100 per cent pension. But still the answers are vague and disheartening to these veterans who wonder what is going on with a government that seems to forget so easily. When anyone mentions this you get a backlash of comparison showing how our pensions are ahead of others. Mr. Speaker, these veterans are aging far ahead of others. It is time we stopped the hypocrisy and repaid the debt that is owed to these veterans in a meaningful and Canadian manner.

How much longer will the European prisoners of war have to wait to get recognition, are they going to be the subject of another study? The studies have all been made with regard to these prisoners of war, Mr. Speaker, and the briefs are multitudinous. I have some of them in my files. Back in 1953, there were the findings and recommendations of the Chief Commissioner on War Claims. I have a study on the effects of malnutrition and other hardships on the mortality and morbidity of former prisoners or world War II, prepared in 1956. There are many other studies in existence. And still this association pleads for reasonable consideration from the government for those who suffered and who continue to be affected. This bill means very little to the veterans of our country because it does not include amendments to compensate for the discrepancies which exist in the Pensions Act. It is only another political gimmick, and the government should be ashamed to pass it.

This bill means nothing unless it includes an amendment to clause 59(3) which permits the Pension Commission to take into account, in deciding on the amount of an exceptional incapacity award, whether the veteran amputee wears a prosthesis. In representations last year from the War Amputees of Canada a contradiction arose regarding the assessment of section 59(3) by the then minister and the Chairman of the Pension Commission. The minister denied that there was a basis for reduction of the exceptional incapacity allowance unless the amputee unreasonably refused to wear a prosthesis. However, the Chairman of the Commission confirmed that the act does require the Commission to take into account the fact that an amputee wears a prosthesis, and will pay less allowance because of it. This is a discrepancy which could have been corrected in this bill if there were any sympathy for our veterans.

There are many other considerations which must be taken into account, many of which have already been mentioned by my colleagues. The time is getting a little late, perhaps too late, to make amends. It is almost too late to amend the eligibility provision for allowances under the War Veterans Allowances Act, and immediate consideration should be given to reducing the require-