

Army Benevolent Fund Act and Related Acts

or more. Survivors of veterans who would have received pensions of 47 per cent or less had they applied are therefore denied benefits under the Pension Act. Bill C-100 will correct this injustice by allowing the Canadian Pension Commission to rule as if the veterans had applied.

I am proud of this legislation. Every amendment will help veterans and their families, and each amendment confirms the Government's commitment to veterans and to social justice. I say again that veterans are fully deserving of our very best efforts. Today this House is again making a best effort on their behalf.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gaston Isabelle (Hull-Aylmer): Mr. Speaker, first of all, as Veterans Affairs critic for the Official Opposition, I am truly delighted with this opportunity to comment briefly on the subject of Bill C-100, tabled in this House by the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Hees), a Bill that is primarily aimed at improving the lot of veterans who are former prisoners of war.

The Bill also increases the amount and improves the availability of pension benefits for spouses, extends the age limit for dependent children and also increases the amount and expands the range of financial assistance for students who are orphans, legally.

Mr. Speaker, I see the Bill as a tribute the Minister of Veterans Affairs is paying today to those who were among the most severely affected by World War II. I would like to comment more specifically on those who were made prisoners of war in Hong Kong in 1941 and at Dieppe in 1942.

Mr. Speaker, you have to talk to those veterans who were prisoners of war to understand how much they suffered, the torture and hunger and the terrible solitary confinement, as well as the whole range of physiological deficiencies they suffered as a result.

Mr. Speaker, speaking of former prisoners of war, perhaps I may recall the former Deputy Minister of National Health and Welfare, Dr. Crawford, who, in private moments, with tears in his eyes, and always with a great deal of emotion, would tell us about the suffering he and his men had endured. He would recall sadly how his soldiers died of the most ordinary infections, due to cold and damp conditions, malnutrition and a lack of the most elementary medical care.

This medical officer I just mentioned, who is someone I remember fondly, was himself severely affected by various kinds of irreversible damage to the spine as a result of his imprisonment. Mr. Speaker, he, like many others, was haunted by the memory of this experience for the remainder of his life.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps I may recall how many of your friends and mine went through the slaughter at Dieppe, those who were taken prisoner and tortured for months on end. Perhaps it would be better not to recall the nightmares that unfortunately

continue to go through the minds of those courageous and intrepid soldiers who were taken prisoner.

In adding these major improvements to the legislation, the Minister of Veterans Affairs is following the example of one of his predecessors, that brave veteran and war amputee, the Hon. Daniel Joseph MacDonald, who left Prince Edward Island and Canada a monument to the memory of all these veterans when he, as Minister, helped to smooth the sharp edges of this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the two men I just mentioned may be said to belong to that host of heroic and generous men whom generations will remember for what they did for their comrades in arms.

I think the Minister of Veterans Affairs has adequately explained to the House the twelve amendments to the legislation especially those applying to certain classifications of veterans, namely the Hong Kong prisoners of war and the Dieppe prisoners. I believe the amendments correct a situation where, as the Minister pointed out quite clearly, the 100 per cent disability could not be exceeded, even if Hong Kong prisoners of war were entitled to a compensatory benefit of 50 per cent.

I am therefore very pleased that the Minister was able to remedy a situation that was terribly unjust, considering what these prisoners of war had done for their country.

Redress was also provided for Dieppe prisoners of war, who still number 1,500. And there is of course the important question of the children's education. The terms have been considerably expanded and made more generous. According to another amendment, to be eligible for post-secondary education it is no longer necessary to finish high school *per se* and,—I am referring to dependent children,—they also have the option of going to a technical school. So this is already a vast improvement, and I think congratulations are in order for the Minister, who has brought in those very important amendments to the veterans legislation. Mr. Speaker, it is never too late to remember the bravery and valor of those who fought and fell on the battlefield, and of others who returned maimed but bearing the flaming torch of freedom which we must continue to nurture and protect.

Mr. Speaker, we must remember that the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Hees) is not a Conservative. He is a generous former soldier who remembers his comrades in arms and knows the best way to improve the lives of those who served their country so well, from the horrors of death row in the dark and dank prisons of Hong Kong to the dreaded cells in Dieppe where prisoners languished in chains, suffering indescribable pain.

I want to thank him again, on behalf of all of us, for having understood the problem and for proposing, as a Liberal in spirit, these twelve legislative measures which I would simply qualify as a much needed update, as equity and reparation,