

Veterans Affairs

to assuage this dissatisfaction may appear to be failure to honour promises of generosity.

The Chairman also pointed out that the advantage to the Government of Canada in assuming the costs of all gallantry awards would provide a "positive image of Canada accepting full responsibility for costs associated with gallantry awards to members of the Canadian Forces".

A meeting of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs to discuss the Estimates on May 30 gave me the opportunity to question the Minister directly on the subject. As I anticipated, the Minister was receptive to my suggestion. In response to my questions the Minister stated:

—it seems to be a reasonable suggestion and as soon as I get the figures from the British High Commissioner I will be able to do something—

The Minister's statement is most encouraging and I am hopeful that his request will become a reality very soon. The Minister has to be counted among the best in Veterans Affairs. He has received well-deserved praise from many segments of the veteran population. He can count me among those who support his efforts to ensure that veterans are given the best treatment possible.

I have made representations to the Minister on behalf of numerous veterans from my riding of Victoria and from elsewhere in Canada. Members of the House will know of my concerns for veterans and of the legislation which I have put forward. I want to continue work in that vein and I am assured of a sympathetic hearing with the current Minister.

In summary, the motion presented today is a request to the Government to pay to recipients of gallantry awards from World War I, along with all recipients of the Distinguished Service Order, the same annuities which are received by Canadian veterans of World War II. A corollary to this, but not included as part of the motion, concerns making the veterans aware of the change. The Minister may wish to consider instructing his officials to prepare an advertisement, which could appear in a publication such as *Legion* magazine, to inform veterans of the change in the payment of the awards.

There are, no doubt, some veterans who not are aware of their entitlement to an annuity. Others—and I know of some who fit into this category—have chosen to forgo a payment from the British Government. However, if the award were to come from their own Canadian Government, they would gladly accept it. The awards represent very small sums of money. They are based on 10 pounds per annum, which is currently approximately \$50 or \$100 per annum, depending on whether the veterans have any other government income. The annuities are a source of enormous pride, far larger than the amount would indicate, to the recipients.

I look forward to this initiative being taken and hope that the motion will gain the necessary acceptance of the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gaston Isabelle (Hull-Aylmer): Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to congratulate the Hon. Member for Victoria (Mr. McKinnon) on the motion standing in his name on the

Order Paper of the House, in which, as he explained so eloquently, he urges the Government to—

—consider the advisability of paying veterans of World War I and all recipients of the DSO, the same annuities with respect to gallantry awards received by veterans of World War II.

I know that the Hon. Member for Victoria, who also served in the military, has done a great deal to improve the lot of our veterans, and especially World War I veterans. At the time, as the Hon. Member described in his speech, everything was the responsibility of the Government of the United Kingdom, especially everything concerning acts of bravery and gallantry, as they used to say, by those who fought under the Canadian flag—the Canadian Expeditionary Force as it was called at the time.

● (1720)

I also wish to congratulate the Hon. Member for Victoria on the detailed exposé given at the last meeting of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, of the problem he outlined for us this afternoon. I feel there is indeed an injustice that should be remedied, because, need I repeat, all acts of bravery and gallantry rewarded either with the Victoria Cross or the George Cross or any of the other awards were remunerated or subsidized by the United Kingdom or England, as we said at the time. This was the case until 1942, when it was decided by order in council that the Government of Canada would pay the annuities with respect to awards given to veterans for distinguished service during World War II. However, nothing was done for veterans of the battlefields of 1914. There is an element of unfairness that should be corrected, and I am very happy to see that the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Hees) is here in the House and is considering the comments made by the Hon. Member for Victoria. I am very pleased.

I also would like to take this opportunity to say a few words about our World War I veterans, for the simple reason that we have never had any official figures on the number of veterans who are still with us. According to the 1971 Census, there were still 18,500, and of that number, 5,000 were receiving a War Veterans Pension or some kind of allowance from the Department of Veterans Affairs. However, I am sure that if we calculate how many veterans are still alive today, the number receiving a pension or an allowance has decreased. In any case, according to the figures available to the Department of Veterans Affairs, it seems that the average age of World War I veterans was 88. I imagine we should follow up at least some of the recommendations that were given in a most eloquent brief submitted by the Canadian Legion on May 30 of this year, which said that all World War I veterans should receive benefits under the new "Aging Program" that has been very successful for the simple reason that it makes it possible for the veteran to live comfortably with his family until he can no longer take care of himself. I believe we can extend life, not indefinitely, of course but quite substantially if we can help these people enjoy a comfortable old age.