

Supply—Veterans Affairs

Kingdom just prior to the recent devaluation of the pound. As a result people in Canada in receipt of this pension expected to get the increase. However, when they cashed their cheques they found they got less than before. If I understand the situation correctly, the decision of the war veterans allowance board was that for war veterans allowance income purposes the British pound would be valued at its pre-devaluation level, with the result that for a one month period recipients of war veterans allowance in Canada actually received less in Canadian dollars than they would have had the British pound not been devalued and the disability pensions not raised.

This kind of action is pretty niggardly, to say the least. I do not understand all the complexities of the timing, but according to my information the practical effect of the situation is that war veterans allowance recipients in Canada are actually receiving a number of dollars less from the United Kingdom, according to the size of their disability pension, than they would have otherwise received. If this is an administrative decision it is a pretty unfortunate one to make at a time when the present government is supposed, as it says, to be exercising economy measures. I hardly think we need go that far. If the minister can clarify the two situations I have raised I think it would be of value to veterans across the country and might perhaps give us some understanding of what course of action should be taken in regard to some of these matters when they are dealt with in greater depth than is possible in this committee at the present moment.

● (5:20 p.m.)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Laniel: Mr. Chairman, I should not like to let the debate on supplementary estimates of the Department of Veterans Affairs go by without saying a few words on the overall problem of Canadian veterans.

A moment ago, the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. Churchill) made some statements which, to my mind, were most unfair for the hon. minister. I do not want to take it upon myself to defend the minister, because I know that he is capable of finding the necessary arguments to justify certain attitudes or positions his department has taken in the face of problems which have come up. But I do want to tell the members I hope personally that in spite of what happens

[Mr. Barnett.]

in the next few days and months, the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Teillet) will continue in that post, for, in my opinion, he is the one who has best served the interests of veterans.

Mr. Chairman, first of all, I wish to congratulate the hon. minister for the step he has taken—that is why the supplementary estimates of his department are before the house—by increasing the veterans' pensions by 15 per cent. If one considers the various increases granted in previous years, one finds that they actually represent a substantial improvement, compared to the pensions paid when the present government came into power.

Of course, there is still a great deal to be done and, personally, I hope that it will be possible to readjust those pensions according to some schedule so as to avoid asking the house constantly for further increases. But until then, Mr. Chairman, I think that the minister is to be commended, and I hope that the inter-departmental committee now considering the basic rates of pensions will be in a position to submit to him a report which will result, in the next months, in the introduction of a piece of legislation designed to settle this problem once and for all.

As far as the Woods report is concerned, I hope, like all members of the veterans affairs committee, that it will be referred as soon as possible to that committee, either the report itself, or a summary of that report, or still a piece of legislation relating thereto. But it is urgent that the officials of the Department of Veterans Affairs provide an opportunity for organizations to make representations and offer comments in order that we may obtain a complete reform and reorganization of the Pension Commission, with a view to improving the situation and serving the interests of veterans better.

I am convinced, Mr. Chairman, that this report which, according to my information will be quite long, will open the way toward improvements in the pension field, for the greater good of veterans.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I would simply thank the members of the house who are members of the committee on veterans affairs for their co-operation, but I would say to them that when this report is sent to the committee, we shall have a great deal of serious work to do, so as to help the minister in accomplishing a reform which has perhaps been delayed, but which will surely be worth it.