

Prisoners of War Medical Examinations

the case, the Department of Veterans Affairs is wrong in its interpretation of the benefit of the doubt clause. We all know that there is very little benefit of the doubt given to our veterans. Those of us who have had to deal with veterans' problems know that a man must have almost incontestable proof his injury resulted from war service before he is eligible for assistance. The motion before us is one way of assisting the veteran in this regard, and it would be a more dignified way than we have adopted in the past. However, by accepting the principle of the motion we open the door to other things. Perhaps the hon. member for Swift Current-Maple Creek (Mr. McIntosh) will excuse me if I add some of my own ideas to the motion and say that we should go beyond what he requests. What we should be doing at this time is to provide a guaranteed annual income for all veterans. We are going to have a guaranteed annual income for the citizens of this country. I am certain of that, although it might be five or eight years from now. It would be a tragic thing if when that guaranteed annual income were established it was too late for those who fought in the wars. Let us have it now, and let us start with our veterans. Let us get rid of this benefit of doubt situation. Let us go beyond the prisoners of war, although I agree that the principle of starting there is a good and valid one. Let us recognize the great work that the sons and daughters of Canada did on behalf of their country and be generous, humane and grateful for their efforts.

● (5:50 p.m.)

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, this notice of motion deals with a more limited number of men than might be seen at first blush. The purpose of it is to bring within medical survey those members of Canada's active armed forces during world war II who were prisoners of war and who have not, for one reason or another, been medically examined in the last five years by either the Canadian Pension Commission or someone on its behalf or by the treatment services of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The purpose of this motion is not to establish pensions for prisoners of war, but rather to do for some of them what was so needed for the Hong Kong prisoners of war. I will be the first one to admit that the degree of privation and malnutrition of European prisoners of war, except perhaps in the odd case, was not nearly as severe as it was in the case of the Hong Kong prisoners of war. It

[Mr. Saltsman.]

took a lot of pushing and prodding by members of the opposition and by some members on the government side some three or four years ago to have all of those members of the Hong Kong force who could be located examined.

There is a rather ironic incident that was told to me by a member of that force who comes from Saskatchewan. I met him during the last election campaign. He said he was called in for an examination and he went to Regina to be examined to see whether he had suffered any disability as a result of having been in Japanese hands. Whom did he meet but a Japanese doctor who was acting on behalf of the Pension Commission. Sometimes some people just do not use their heads. I put both men in a very difficult position. I am sure that the doctor himself would not have willingly accepted that task if he had known what was going to happen. What this Hong Kong veteran said to me afterwards was not printable and certainly should not be repeated. He did not think much of the type of service that had been given to him.

The Dieppe Prisoner of War Association was organized by a former Royal Canadian Engineer, one of the real sluggers. This chap by the name of Sandy Shusterman is now a taxi driver in Toronto, and an indefatigable man working in the interest of prisoners of war. The Dieppe Prisoner of War Association has tried to encourage prisoners of war to get together to make representations. They should emulate New Zealand Veterans. I have never seen such a strong organization of veterans as the New Zealand Prisoner of War Association who have been very active in keeping the interests of their members before the governing authorities.

The purpose of this motion—and both the hon. member for Swift Current-Maple Creek (Mr. MacIntosh) and I collaborated very closely on this—is to get those men who have not been seen by the Pension Commission or the treatment services within the last years, examined and documented. For one thing preventive medicine is better than curative medicine at any time and, as my colleague said, the records of illnesses during those two or three years that the men were imprisoned were not very complete.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there have been occasions when I have had to make a personal statement in support of one of those people who were in my camp attesting to the fact that this man had suffered from a cold and from certain privations because 10 or 15