

will not take the government another five years to make a review of veterans legislation. I suggest that the government should provide in this legislation the means for reviewing pensions and allowances for veterans automatically so that we do not need to go through the same rigmarole every time we want to do something for our veterans.

I am not a veteran because I have never been in the services, but many veterans have a fixed income, as other hon. members have pointed out, and it is pretty tough for them to have to beg, to write to their Member of Parliament, to the government, to the minister. This is why I hope the committee will examine ways of reviewing the pension situation, with perhaps adjustment of veterans pensions and allowances every year in tune with the cost of living.

I am told that additional veterans legislation will have to be introduced later this session. I ask, what kind of racket is this? As I say, the government has taken five years to produce this legislation. Why cannot the government make a complete review and overhaul of assistance given to our veterans? Too often have we dealt with bits and pieces of veterans legislation during the 2½ years I have been in this House. This makes me wonder whether this is simply typical of this government or indeed has been going on for some time. No wonder the public sometimes becomes disillusioned because governments do not do a thorough job.

The hon. member for Malpeque (Mr. MacLean) pointed out that new legislation will have to be introduced. Obviously, the government wanted to do something for the veterans because it was politically wise to do so. After a while pensions of veterans must be increased to keep abreast of the cost of living. At the same time, the government does not want to go all out because other areas of assistance might suffer. As I say, I am not a veteran but I am a war baby in the sense that I was born during the war. I know nothing about either the first world war or the second, or even Hong Kong, other than what I have read. I was too young to understand what was going on. However, since I have been a member I have learned to appreciate what our veterans are worth, and in this regard I have learned a lot. I have developed a respect for what these people are trying to achieve and for trying to help themselves. I say that sincerely.

Over the last couple of years a great debate has been waged on the subject of Canadian unity. Many members have referred to the fact that the war brought about unity in Canada; it united Canadians. To prove my point, there was a little war in Quebec very recently and the people stood united. The veterans have done a great deal for Canada, and this is why I do not think we can simply wait another five years before reviewing their lot.

The hon. member for Bruce (Mr. Whicher) said that Canada had better veterans legislation than any other country. So what? What does that prove? I do not think it proves very much. Let us not hide behind this sort of excuse. Canada is a better country than any other country, so we cannot simply say that since we have better

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legislation our veterans should be satisfied. We probably live better than most other people.

Mr. McIntosh: And because of the veterans.

Mr. Comeau: Probably because of the veterans, as my hon. friend says. One matter that does irritate me—and I hope the new bill will deal with it—is the bureaucracy that confronts a veteran who applies for veterans allowance or pension. I know it is 25 years since the end of the second world war and it is hard for a veteran to produce evidence that such and such happened during the war, but surely some of these veteran applicants can make a logical case. I submit that many times applications are not looked at in their proper context. They are not given the consideration they deserve, and this is what irritates me. I realize that many applications that I and other hon. members receive are of long standing in the sense that the veterans come to us as a sort of last resort. But many applications are returned with the request for more evidence, or they are rejected, or perhaps an appeal is granted and the whole thing starts over again. It depends, of course, what the application is; an appeal cannot be had on anything.

Having worked on a few veterans cases over the years, though not many, I am becoming more frustrated day by day. To my mind the minister and his department should be the protectors of the veterans from the government and from other ministers who are concerned about looking after their own interests. I sometimes feel that the department is protecting the government from the veterans. It is the department that should make a case for the veterans, and present it to the government. I have on my files many letters from veterans for whom I have done some work. I made a note of how many of the applications they made were rejected or received. I came to the conclusion that 90 per cent of the applications were rejected. In many cases there was no evidence to submit and there was nothing more the veteran could do.

● (9:30 p.m.)

I realize that some lobbying has to be done and that the minister has to deal with the pension office, but the results should not be as they have in the past. I hope this bill will result in an improvement in appeal procedures as well as in respect of the benefit of doubt clause. I will reserve my criticism until I see the results. I hope this measure will assist the veterans. Many of them have no other source of income; they rely on these pensions for a livelihood.

This afternoon a number of members suggested the minister is taking a great step forward. There is no question about that. Many of the veterans who have written to me are disappointed about this bill. I have a letter before me, parts of which I should like to read. After explaining to this individual what will happen with the passage of this legislation, he wrote and said he had hoped something better might have come out of the legislation. He said he was sitting with \$2.62 in his pocket, waiting for Santa to do something about it. He said he had four army disabilities and was pensioned in