

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

PENSION ACT AND CIVILIAN WAR PENSIONS AND ALLOWANCES ACT

PROVISION OF INCREASES IN BENEFITS

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Dubé that Bill C-203, to amend the Pension Act and the Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

Mr. Gilbert Rondeau (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, before recess we were considering Bill C-203 which aims mostly at making the existing veterans legislation more flexible.

We were saying that this bill certainly had much merit because we often-times noted that the legislation which had not been amended for a long time, was in need of change. We are happy that the minister saw fit, perhaps a little late unfortunately, to make more flexible the legislation which at present makes it possible for all veterans to receive a pension.

Our main criticism of the bill is that it does not provide for an annual automatic adjustment of the pension to take into account the increase in the cost of living.

Although the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has stated over the Christmas recess that inflation no longer existed in Canada—just as if one fine morning he had met inflation on the street and had grabbed it to throw it into the nearest garbage pail—price inflation and pocket deflation still exist in Canada. In fact, they still exist as far as veterans are concerned and they will continue to exist as long as the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) tolerates the present financial system in which price inflation and pocket deflation find their roots.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must remind the hon. member that the House is now studying a bill dealing with veterans and I do not believe that he can take this opportunity to discuss the Canadian financial system.

It seems to me that he is straying from the question somewhat and I would ask him to limit his comments as far as possible to the essence of the bill under consideration.

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, I understand that my remarks were not altogether relevant, but as we are dealing with pensions I was saying that the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Dubé) should have provided for an automatic yearly adjustment of the pension so that the latter would remain in line with the cost of living which I was commenting upon.

If the Minister of Veterans Affairs had included such a clause, he would have rendered a valuable service to all veterans whose pensions are constantly eroded by increases in the cost of living, although the Prime Minister has announced that its vertiginous ascent would be stopped by a suppression of inflation.

The 10 per cent increase of pensions provided by this bill represents roughly the cost of living increase for an

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18-month period. That is the reason why the increase provided in this bill does not constitute a long term measure, considering inflation.

Before putting an end to my comments, I hope that the new Pension Review Board which will be asked to study the cases of veterans will do so in a humanitarian spirit, and that veterans who will have to call upon the board do not have to put up with a lot of red tape.

Thus, vexations would be eliminated rather than the greatest possible number of applications from veterans through a useless multiplication of required formalities.

Mr. Speaker, we shall have other opportunities to discuss this bill, whether in committee or on third reading; we hope that the committee will make recommendations out of these suggestions so that the minister will be able to take them into consideration and turn them not into words but into concrete actions; the bill has been delayed quite a while before being returned to the House and I think more time will be needed to complete its consideration.

That is why I feel the Minister of Veterans Affairs should take this opportunity to incorporate all valid recommendations into the act. To my mind, the recommendations of the committee and those of this House are valid because they are based on facts. I am thinking of some of the anomalies in the act which we want to eradicate by the passing of this bill and certain amendments we will propose on third reading.

Still, we must congratulate the minister for having introduced this bill which, on the whole, pleases many veterans, for it has been expected for many years. It will serve at least to reduce the bureaucracy and give more flexibility to the administration. The Review Board is intended to make decisions more human. Formerly, they were made by a civil servant and there was no right of appeal.

I congratulate the minister and I ask him to kindly take into account our recommendations, especially those of the committee.

● (8:10 p.m.)

[*English*]

Mr. Ross Whicher (Bruce): Mr. Speaker, it was rather amusing for one to sit here all afternoon and listen to the official spokesmen of the opposition parties very grudgingly give credit to the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Dubé) for the step forward he and the government have undoubtedly taken for the veterans of Canada. I appreciate that books have been written about the duty of opposition parties being to oppose. I always have felt that opposition should be tempered by common sense. In this instance, instead of casting any reflection on the minister responsible for this legislation, each and every member of the opposition parties should give him due credit, and credit is certainly coming to him. Most certainly this is the way the veterans of Canada feel about the minister.

May I respectfully suggest that in your quieter moments, Mr. Speaker—I know that they are not numerous—you read the national magazine of the Royal Canadian Legion. On the front cover of the January,