

Veterans Allowance Increases

death arising out of military service, in so far as it is reasonable and practicable to equate monetary values with human suffering and bereavement.

This is done through the Pension Act, the keystone of Canadian veterans legislation since 1919. It provides for the payment of pensions to the disabled veteran, his widow and his orphan, and to his dependent parents, sisters and brothers.

In addition, an award of pension also makes the recipient or his family eligible for other benefits. The veteran himself becomes eligible for medical treatment for his pensioned condition, special re-employment training if he needs it, war veterans allowance, and funeral and burial grants. After his death, his widow is eligible for war veterans allowance, and his pensioned children for advanced educational assistance.

The veterans of Canada comprise about one twelfth of the country's total adult population. Approximately 832,600 of these are veterans of World War II (or of both wars or of Korea) and another 112,600 are veterans of World War I. Of these two groups a total of 136,800 veterans were in receipt of pensions under the Pension Act as of December 31, 1968, and a further 29,800 pensions were in payment to the dependents or survivors of veterans.

● (4:10 p.m.)

For many years the Pension Act and the Pension Regulations which preceded it, have provided that pensions should be related to earning power; and the adjudication of pension claims has been the responsibility of an independent and impartial tribunal.

While adhering strictly to these basic principles, successive governments have found it necessary to review and amend the act in one way or another. Indeed, there have been few years during the half century when some change hasn't been made to the act.

The government is indeed aware of problems affecting war veterans, as well as thousands of other Canadians, and it is doing all that is possible to meet the situation in a rational way. There is no reason to assume that it has not kept faith with our comrades.

With regard to the amendment moved by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), I shall not find great difficulty in supporting it. I recall the statement that he made during the debate on June 20, 1969, when he voiced the suspicion that the government was going to draft legislation in advance of hearings on the Woods Report. We all know how wrong he was in his assessment, Mr. Speaker.

As pointed out by the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis), the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs held 39 meetings and heard witnesses from no less than 19 veterans organizations. I wish at this point to name the principal ones: The Royal Canadian Legion, the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada, the War Pensioners of Canada, the Sir Arthur Pearson Association for War Blinded, the Canadian Paraplegic Association, the Canadian Corps Association, the Nursing Sisters' Association of Canada, the National Dieppe Prisoner of War Association, the Hong Kong Veterans Association of Canada, The War Amputations of Canada, the National Council of Veterans Association in Canada, the Nationally Chartered Veterans Organizations, etc.

The Committee examined in detail each of the 148 recommendations of the Woods Report and, of course, all the proposals contained in the White Paper were closely scrutinized. The long and laborious study of the White

[Mr. Badanai.]

Paper, which kept the Committee working several weeks during the summer parliamentary recess, is evidence that the members of the committee took their responsibilities seriously. When the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis), Chairman of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, presented the report to the House, its members had reason to feel that a good job had been done. It was a good report upon which, no doubt, legislation will be based.

One cannot exactly blame the government for the delay in the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report, because a great deal of work is involved in the preparation of such a complicated piece of legislation. As an example, the Committee spent considerable time reviewing the appeal procedures suggested on the one hand by the white paper and, on the other hand, by the Veterans Associations, which were essentially modifications and extensions of the Woods recommendations. We were very much concerned about the principle of an independent review board being stacked on top of an independent pension commission. This appeared to raise a fundamental question of public administration, but the representations by the Veterans Associations were strong, persistent and deliberate on this point and, under the circumstances, the committee decided to recommend that the procedures essentially recommended by the veterans associations in the final hearings in April 1970, should be adopted with a slight modification.

The committee had also reservations concerning the observations of the veterans associations on the ability of the Canadian Pension Commission to delegate responsibility to field staff, and also on the suggestion that a single commissioner should be able to make decisions. It was the opinion of the committee that decisions should be signed by more than one commissioner in the interests of uniformity of administration. The committee had also reservations regarding the ability of 12 commissioners to be able to cope with the work load.

The committee felt that it would be difficult to foresee the operations of the Pension Review Board with any degree of certainty or to forecast, with any degree of assurance, the number of claims which would come before the board and the commission for adjudication in the future. Therefore, the committee suggested that the organization and procedure of both the Review Board and the commission be reviewed every five years. For these reasons, the committee considered the appointment of commissioners for a specific term being preferable to a life appointment, which veterans organizations had recommended. I have cited only one of the many points in the recommendations which are of a complicated nature, requiring a great deal of work in drafting the bill, which once introduced I am confident will please everyone concerned.

I am not questioning the sincerity of the mover of this motion. In fact, I congratulate him. Nevertheless, it should be made clear that we on this side consider the interests of war veterans with just as much zeal and dedication as any of those sitting on the benches of the opposition. I have also great faith in the minister, who has pointed out on several occasions that it is the Gov-