

*Pension Act*

I think the minister is correct in saying that there was general approval of his statement not only in the house, but throughout the country. As a matter of fact I have heard few statements in this house which received so much approval as the statement which the minister made. We all welcomed his announcement to the effect that there would be an increase in the basic rate of pension. As I pointed out after the statement was made the other day, we have waited long for this increase in the basic rate—waited nearly a year. I think the general approval indicated throughout the house and country was of the fact that, after a year of waiting, the government has realized that this has to be done, and that the matter is being attended to.

I should like to read an editorial in the *Ottawa Journal* of November 20 which, I think, expresses well the general reaction throughout the country. It says:

Seldom has the government taken a step that met with such general approval. All the opposition parties in the Commons have been urging that disabled veterans should have higher pensions, and the veterans organizations have pointed out that the old pension rates were totally inadequate in this period of inflated prices. Nobody disputes the proposition that the state has a special responsibility to those who are maimed, or lost their health, in its defence.

I think that states fairly and correctly the general attitude regarding this increase in the basic rate of pension.

I would also congratulate at this time the different veterans organizations throughout the country. I noticed that in his remarks the other day the minister said that it was after reviewing the situation and considering recent representations of the veterans organizations that the government had come to this conclusion. I know from my own personal experience that the veterans throughout Canada have worked long and diligently to have this change brought about.

I suggest, too, as is mentioned in the editorial I read, that the different opposition parties in the house deserve congratulations on the splendid effort they have made to bring about this increase in the basic rate of pension. Anyone who will take the trouble to read again the report of the activities of the last veterans committee will see that, from the very outset, from the very first meeting, day after day and meeting after meeting, opposition members on that veterans affairs committee pleaded with government members and with the government to have this matter of basic pensions reconsidered with a view to having an increase in the amount.

As I have said on former occasions, we were greatly disappointed when the matter was

not attended to at the last session of parliament. The government's action is now obvious. It has done the only thing it could do. I am sure there is no fair-minded man either in the house or outside it who could have contemplated doing less than has been done. The present suggestion by the minister that there should be an increase is certainly the correct one. And when we take into consideration the greatly increased cost of living in Canada, and the fact that this is the basis upon which the increase in pension is being granted, we realize at once that the matter should have been attended to long before this.

I should like to say a word concerning the unemployability supplement, known as item 650 in last session's estimates. In his statement the other day the minister said that the unemployability supplement had served a most useful purpose, and afforded an opportunity for getting valuable information. Yes, it has served a most useful purpose. It has served the purpose of indicating to the government that the veterans, the returned soldiers of this country, will not stand for any change in the fundamental principles of the Pension Act.

The unemployability supplement was a new departure, in that it introduced the principle of need in place of right. I hope that never again will such a principle be introduced in the pension legislation of this country. The minister is quite correct when he says that its introduction has served a useful purpose, because it has indicated to the people of Canada a most unfair way of treating veterans. He has also said that its introduction afforded very valuable information. Well, it afforded information to his department, just as it did to the house, that the veterans across Canada were one hundred per cent opposed to the principle of the introduction of the unemployability supplement, as set out in item 650.

In meetings of the committee last session it was pointed out time and again that the unemployability supplement was a most unfair and unjust principle. We considered it the most unfair and unjust principle that had ever been introduced into Canadian legislation.

One would have a short memory indeed if he did not remember the proceedings in the last special committee. I shall not review them to any extent this afternoon, except to point out again that when the motion to approve item 650 was brought before the special committee on May 31 of this year it was moved by the hon. member for Spadina (Mr. Croll)