

*Pension Act*

position in the civil service if a returned man, who is much older, has secured the minimum number of marks. And no one knows how many classes of young men will be called up during this war. Conscription applies to all. Those who are exempted are exempted because they are medically unfit, or because, in a very few cases, they are required in industry necessary to winning the war. Therefore all our young men are coming under the same military law, and I do not see why now, twenty-two and a half years after the conclusion of the great war, we should maintain this preference in the Civil Service Act which is applicable only to the veterans of the last great war. I cannot understand why that principle should be maintained. If a young man is wounded in this war, he enjoys no preference in appointment to the civil service. If a young man is rejected because he is not physically fit, does that mean that he will be deprived of equality of status in appointments by the civil service commission?

It is not my duty to decide this question, but it seems to me that it will be the duty of the pensions committee to study these questions from all angles with a view to seeing whether it is not time now, the veterans having enjoyed this preference for twenty-two and a half years, that the preference should be withdrawn so that the civil service may be improved by the appointment of the very best men. When I asked Mr. Bland, the chairman of the civil service commission, if the standard of the civil service was not lowered by the fact that at times appointments were made of men who had obtained the minimum number of marks instead of the maximum, his answer was in the affirmative. And the truth is self-evident. I hope that the present government and this House of Commons will not repeat the folly of the last government and decide everything upon sentiment. You must decide it upon reason. You must not discriminate against anybody. Give everybody in this country a fair chance. I leave it at that, for the members of the committee to discuss this matter thoroughly when the time comes.

Mr. MACKENZIE (Vancouver Centre): Just one or two references to the statement which has been made by the hon. member for Témiscouata (Mr. Pouliot). In the first place we are supposed to be discussing amendments to the Pension Act, which has nothing to do with the civil service preference for ex-service men. In the second place it is within the knowledge of every member that the present legislation is the result of the conjoint and concerted efforts of all parties in the house over a period of more than twenty years.

[Mr. Pouliot.]

There has never been the slightest trace of partisan feeling, so far as my knowledge goes—and I know something about it—in the several pension committees that have sat from 1919 down to the present time. After a study of pension legislation in other countries I am convinced that we have in Canada, with the exception of one or two anomalies here and there, the finest pension legislation in the British empire and possibly in the whole world. That has been the result of the unfettered judgment and hard application of hon. members of this house in previous years working in committee, just as this committee will be working for the next few weeks.

In regard to the gentlemen administering the act, they are as fine a body as you will find in the Dominion of Canada, and I personally resent on their behalf any attack upon their integrity, their motives or their ability. Derogatory language was used also with reference to some of the medical officers connected with the administration of pensions. In my judgment such remarks do not worthily reflect upon anyone who utters them. These men belong to one of the noblest professions in the world and they are doing their best to serve the department and the country, as we in this chamber are endeavouring to serve the country. I have found on their part nothing but a desire to render the best service possible and I absolutely repudiate any suggestion of unfairness or of inability in the administration of the work which has been entrusted to them.

I will not discuss at this stage the question of preferences. That question can be discussed if the committee deals with the matter of rehabilitation. I suggest that we should not be given to extreme or extravagant language at this juncture in view of the fact that a committee representing every group in the house will have an opportunity during the next few weeks to study the whole question of pension legislation, veterans' allowances, administration and general problems of rehabilitation.

Mr. MacNICOL: I am very glad indeed to hear the closing remarks of the minister and the assurance that the purpose of the committee is to study all angles in connection with any changes that may be contemplated in the pension act. What I rose to say is this. When I had first heard that the Pension Act was to be amended I had hoped that it would embrace something with regard to the widening of the regulations pertaining to the widows of deceased pensioners. The first part of the resolution reads:

That it is expedient to amend the Pension Act to make its provisions applicable to certain members of the Canadian forces serving in the present war and to their dependents.