

# THE BONUS LOBBY RIDES AGAIN

BY STANLEY HIGH

A NEW tentacle from an old octopus quietly slithered into the Capitol during this session of Congress. If allowed to grow, it will suck from the Treasury of the United States an estimated thirty-five billion dollars. The money will be sucked from all the people; it will go to a minority who have no honorable claim upon it. That they will get it — the public-be-damned — seems likely. They will get it, barring the uprising of a public damned too often, because the power behind the octopus is the ex-soldiers' lobby. Between it and the till is only the Congress of the United States which that lobby, despite the patriotic good sense of the vast body of ex-soldiers for whom it presumes to speak, long ago learned how to cower.

The tentacle itself looks harmless enough. Its first cost to the government may be no more than \$25,000,000 a year. Small change! That sum is for widows and orphans and dependent parents. Gallant gesture! In fact, so plausible has it been made to appear and so quietly

has it been maneuvered that its approach has caused none of the outcry which, when it is too late, is almost certain to arise. Close-up, the twenty-five million involved turns out to be important, not for what it is but for what it threatens. And the widows and orphans are first, not because of chivalry, but as a shield. This particular army is not operating in front of the women and children, but behind them.

The measure embodying this devious strategy provides pensions to widows and orphans of World War soldiers. The pension will not be confined to widows of soldiers who died because of disabilities incurred in the war. They are rightly pensioned already, none too generously, and nobody begrudges that outlay. Neither will it be limited to widows of men who went overseas. If, on the eve of the Armistice the government drafted a young man into the army and if, for three months, he served his country in some pleasant cantonment, his widow — regardless of when or how he later died — will

be qualified to collect. If she had a child by the former soldier, she will be qualified if her marriage to him took place at any time up to the passage of the measure, though it is twenty-one years since the war. If childless, she must have been married prior to July 3, 1919, when the war officially ended.

The amount she can collect will be limited, at this come-on stage of the game, to \$20 a month, with six dollars added for one child and four dollars each for additional children. The unpretentious \$25,000,000 first-year cut will increase as time takes its added toll among ex-soldiers of the war. Within a decade the bill may be a billion a year.

If the ex-soldiers' lobby succeeds in getting this pension it is almost certain to be back next year, or some year thereafter, to push through pensions for all widows regardless of when they married. Such a procedure will conform both to the time-tried tactics of the lobby and to the precedents already set for widows of the died-in-bed soldiers of previous wars. At this session, for example, the House Committee has reported favorably a bill to pension, at \$50 to \$75 a month, widows who married veterans forty years or more after the Civil War. The last pension-draw-

ing widow of the American Revolution died in 1906. One pensioner of the War of 1812 is still collecting. On such a basis, some purposeful young woman who marries a World War soldier late in his declining years will be collecting as a World War widow in the 128th post-war year of our Lord, 2046.

But if history, precedent and the off-the-record statements of the ex-soldiers' lobbyists mean a thing, then it is not pensions for World War widows that are most portentously on the way, but pensions for the World War soldiers themselves. The ultimate, additional cost of that to the American pocketbook will exceed twenty billions. Already, bills to pension World War veterans sixty years old and above are before the House Committee. One, calling for \$60 a month, would cost \$112,000,000 a year at the outset, rise steadily for ten years, then dwindle.

## II

Soldiers' pensions are not a new American phenomenon. It has been a long-standing assumption that after every war we should have to pay our heroes. The Northern veterans of the Civil War were pensioned. Two years ago, Mr. Roosevelt signed a bill which granted \$60

a month to all soldiers, sixty-five years and beyond, of our 100 days' war with Spain. That, said Mr. Roosevelt, was to set no pension precedent for the World War soldiery. "Theirs is a different case." The difference was not because patriotism among the organized soldiers of the World War had no monetary value. It was because Congress, with what proved to be futile foresight, adopted a non-pension plan by which to pay them.

Basic army pay was fixed at \$30 a month. That was twice the pay for the Spanish-American War. To every soldier honorably discharged, the government gave \$60. That cost \$244,000,000. War Risk Insurance policies were taken out on the men in service. Three-fourths of the cost of this came from the Treasury. To date, more than two billion dollars has been paid out on those policies. Policies still in force (converted now to straight life insurance) total \$2,500,000,000. To help the soldiers in their return to peace-time occupations, the government organized a vast vocational training program. That cost \$645,000,000. All in all, to protect itself against post-war raids on the Treasury, the government spent three billion dollars. It was the fond, patriotic hope that with this

unprecedented liberality the ex-soldiers would be satisfied.

They were — for something less than a year. When an American Legion caucus met in May, 1919, the delegates rousingly agreed with "Young Teddy" Roosevelt that their objective was "to put something into the government, instead of subtracting something from it." But by November, when the first Legion convention met, the professional veteran had put in his appearance. The patriotism he preached had a golden glow. The convention plumped for the bonus — more palatably described as "adjusted compensation." Since then, the professional veterans and their supporting minority have had things pretty much their own way. Since 1919 they have bowled over, one after another, the obstacles which stood between the already well-rewarded ex-soldiers and a blanket pension.

The bonus itself was such an obstacle. In the bonus law forced from Congress by the ex-soldiers — and over the veto of President Coolidge — the men received one dollar for each day of service, \$1.25 additional for each day served overseas, on the theory that this adjusted the difference between soldiers' pay and the wages of civilians. The grant was made in bonus

certificates due to mature in 1945. But the far-sighted professional patriots were aware that by 1945, with the veterans passing middle age, the time would be ripe for a pension drive. They were aware also that such a drive could not very well be staged with the bonus falling due. The conclusion was inescapable: cash the bonus early, give the country a spell in which to forget, and then clear the decks for the supreme clean-up.

Consequently, and over the veto of President Roosevelt, the bonus agreement was broken under duress of the most arrogant lobby this country ever has seen and the bonus was paid in 1936 — nine years ahead of schedule. That cost the government \$3,732,000,000.

But there were other pension obstacles to be cleared. Early legislation had put the veterans actually disabled in the service of their country in a class by themselves. Laws were passed, none of them too liberal, to care for them and to compensate their dependents. The country emphatically approved. The service-disabled soldier was, to the extent of his disability, a just charge upon the government.

That charge has been grudgingly met. Until 1938, when the amount was raised to \$38, a bona fide World War widow — whose husband's

death was a result of war service — received only \$30 a month. The country undoubtedly would support Congressional measures aimed at dealing more liberally with the actual casualties of the war. But since the dead do not vote and the votes of the war-wounded are few, the politicians are likely to continue to economize at the expense of the authentic veterans and open the spigot for the ex-soldiers. The first step in this direction came when the professional veterans began to force acceptance of the assumption that all ex-soldiers, war-disabled or not, are permanently privileged and a charge upon the government. Part of their maneuvering went on, as at present, behind the widows and orphans. Prior to 1933, a widow could collect monthly compensation averaging \$29.21 only if her ex-soldier husband had died from causes connected with the war. That sensible distinction was wiped out.

First, the lobbyists put through a bill which made it unnecessary for the widow to prove that her husband's death had any connection with the war. All she had to prove was that war had inflicted upon him a 30 per cent disability. The coffers were opened, regardless of whether that disability had anything whatsoever to do with his

passing. But the 30 per cent disability item made too great a distinction between the authentic and wounded veterans and the unharmed millions of ex-soldiers. Consequently, in 1937, the degree of disability necessary to permit the widow to collect — and regardless of the cause of death — was reduced to 20 per cent. In 1938, it was further reduced to 10 per cent. Last year regulations were further liberalized. The law once provided that the widow could not collect if the soldier's death was due to his own misconduct. That provision was eliminated. The law required that the widow should have had at least one child by her ex-soldier husband. That restriction was likewise removed.

The widows and orphans were the screen for a bigger maneuver. In 1933 Congress, wincing under the screws, decreed pensions to all permanently disabled soldiers regardless of whether or not their disability was traceable to war. Thus, ex-soldiers were lifted into the permanently privileged classification once reserved for the war-wounded. Thus, also, the principle of the government's permanent obligation to support them was established.

This accumulated partial-pension legislation, up to June 30, 1939, had

netted the ex-soldiers and their dependents \$3,838,000,000. Then the drive was extended.

### III

Immediately after the war, the government instituted a program of hospitalization to care for the bona fide war casualties. Today, it is no longer necessary for ex-soldiers to have war-connected disabilities to secure free hospitalization in eighty-four institutions. In fact, since 1924, 75 per cent or 1,206,966 of all those admitted into veterans' hospitals have been treated for ailments not traceable to the war. The percentage is increasing. Last year it was 92 per cent. For good measure, free dental service is also provided. Last year 72,000 ex-soldiers were given free dental treatment at a cost to the government of \$1,000,000. Likewise, the government guarantees, up to \$100, a hero's burial for every ex-soldier. That, in 1939, cost \$220,000 a month.

Thus, in addition to the three billion dollars which the government spent to provide just compensation and to protect the public till, the ex-soldiers have collected seven billion. And in the process the lobbyists have managed to get the ex-service man about where he

needs to be to score his final and biggest killing: on a par with the pensioned war-wounded and with the pensioned dependents of the war-dead. The current measure for widows and orphans will just about complete that strategy. The widow will not be required to show that her husband was in any degree injured in the war, or that he ever got within 5000 miles of the fighting. What she will have to show is an honorable discharge indicating that her late ex-soldier served, somewhere, for as long as ninety days.

It is already clear that pensions for all are hard on the heels of this proposal. The concluding plank in the current legislative platform of the Veterans of Foreign Wars is this: "honorably discharged sixty-five-year-old, ninety-day world war veterans to receive pensions of \$60 a month." Thus, after this long and costly maneuvering, the threat is in the open.

The most important personalities behind the threat are Colonel John Thomas Taylor, head Washington lobbyist for the American Legion, Millard W. Rice, head lobbyist for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Representative John E. Rankin, chairman of the House Committee on World War Veterans' Legislation.

Taylor, handsome and husky, has grown gray at his post. The walls of his unpretentious office are lined with bound volumes which contain, as far as it is humanly possible to collect them, every important word that has been spoken on World War veterans' legislation. They will go, after the veterans' lobby has tottered from the scene, to the Library of Congress for posterity to view and marvel at. Almost single-handedly, Colonel Taylor has made the Legion's Legislative Committee what it is today: the Capitol's most fear-provoking lobby. The Colonel's friendliness has a hard-boiled undertone. He shrugs off his critics, side-steps premature commitments and chooses his words with political discretion. At an earlier period he eschewed "the bonus," preferring instead "adjusted compensation." Nowadays, he does not speak of "pensions." His word for it is "protection."

Millard Rice of the V.F.W. is short, voluble and emphatic. He is also less choosy. He "knows" that the Legion, behind the scenes, is moving toward pensions. "The records show," he says, "that we generally anticipate the Legion's plans by about two years." Colonel Taylor, on that point, is suggestively wary. "This year," he says,

“we are not pushing for pensions. As for the future, who knows?”

On Capitol Hill, Mr. Rankin, a twenty-two-day veteran himself, swings in his swivel chair, ruffles his thinning but still unruly hair and views the developing tide without alarm. Tides of this sort do not engulf him. He rides them. In defense of the current legislation which will pension the widows of the ninety-day heroes he recently let Congress know that “this great country of ours does not neglect the man who bared his breast to the enemy in time of war.” He, like Colonel Taylor, dislikes to speak of pensions. What he prefers to speak of is the necessity of granting “something” to the ex-soldiers at once lest “something bigger” be irresistibly demanded too soon.

When, generalised by this trio, the organized ex-soldiery of the World War get their pensions, they and their lobbyists will have sold patriotism for more money than it ever brought before in all the record of mercenary soldiering. It

can be safely assumed that a majority of the World War’s ex-soldiers, a majority also of the American Legion, desires no such highly dubious distinction. This developing crisis, as much as that of 1917, is theirs to meet. Only they can stop the threat of this new depredation. Only they can preserve, untarnished, some part of the uncalculating idealism with which their generation went forth to war.

The Organization of Disabled Veterans, numbering 50,000, is not supporting the pension drive. The American Veterans Association, 17,000 strong, is waging a gallant fight against it. But they are not enough. Officers and members of local capital Legion and V.F.W. posts and state organizations should realize what their Washington lobbies are doing in their name and take their stand against it. Many Legionnaires call themselves conservative, protest against government spending, demand budget-balancing. Here is a chance for them to show their true colors.



## IF RUSSIA TURNS ON CHINA

BY FREDA UTLEY

THE loyal support given to Chiang Kai-shek's government by the Chinese communists has been until now one of the chief factors in holding China united in the face of invasion. Without it Chiang could not have continued fighting Japan for three years in spite of fearful military and economic handicaps. Should that support be withdrawn, the central authorities may find it impossible to maintain the present political amalgam which includes everything from reactionary village gentry and bankers to the extreme Left. A break-up of the united front against Japan would almost inevitably mean a new instalment of regional and class wars in China's tragic history. Yet it is precisely such a break-up which looms on the horizon, through the growing possibility of the defection of the organized communists. If it takes place, the Far Eastern picture will be suddenly and violently altered, the China war may merge with the European war, and the interests of the United States would be more

intimately affected than they have been by anything in Europe thus far.

The policies of the Soviet Union in the Far East, particularly as mirrored in the attitude of the Chinese communists, have received scant attention in the rest of the world. But in the long run they may overshadow all other international events.

It should be recalled that the transformation of the Chinese Communist Party into a champion of democracy and *national* salvation came as part of a similar transformation of all sections of the Communist International in 1935. It was wholly in conformity with the new "party line" then ordered by the Kremlin. That line has been completely reversed since the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pacts in August. Thousands of individual communists have rebelled against the somersault, but the organized and subsidized communist parties have accepted the change. The only exception to this general communist reversal is China, where