CIVIL WAR PENSIONS PROBLEM

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	BACKGROUND OF THE PENSION SYSTEM	3
II.	THE PRIVATE PENSION ACT ABUSE	16
III.	PRESIDENT CLEVELAND AND HIS PENSION VETOES	28
IV.	THE INFLUENCE OF THE G. A. R. ON THE PENSION SYSTEM	39
V.	COST OF THE PENSION SYSTEM TO THE GOVERNMENT	51
VI.	SOME OF THE EVILS OF THE PENSION SYSTEM	65
	APPENDIX I	73
	APPENDIX II	76
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	80

Preface

In this study I have attempted to give a picture of the pension system, as it grew up after the Civil War, and to show some of the abuses that developed as a result of pension legislation for Civil War veterans. The principal reason why I have interested myself in this subject is the fact that the soldier bonus is becoming such a vital subject in national politics today, and that there is the not-so-remote possibility that the "bonus" problem may lead to more serious a pension problem in the years to come than that which followed the Civil War. There is also the possibility that the American Legion, the organization for the World War veterans, may play the same role in influencing legislation on the subject as the Grand Army of the Republic did in former years.

For most of the material used in this study, I have relied on the resources of the library of Kansas State College. The legislative library in Topeka, and a private collection of law books in Manhattan were also used.

The author is very grateful for the helpful suggestions given by Dr. Fred A. Shannon in writing this thesis. The author also wishes to thank the librarians for their kind assistance and patience.

Dorothy Rosencrans Donnelly.

Chapter I

BACKGROUND OF THE PENSION SYSTEM

A military pension is a regular payment made by a government to one who has served in its armed forces, or to his widow or dependent relatives. It is a gratuity given to former soldiers or their relatives for reasons satisfactory to the government, whether as compensation for physical injuries, to relieve want, or purely as a reward. Army pay and pensions are not matters of contract. No claim for a pension can be enforced against the state.[1] Even when the benefits of pension provisions have been promised in order to secure voluntary enlistments in the army, soldiers must rely solely upon the good faith of the government for the fulfillment of such promises. In the performance of his duty, a soldier may become the victim of wounds, disease, or death, but these incidents of warfare give him no right to a pension enforceable against an unwilling government.[2]

In the United States, disability pensions have been the rule since the earliest days of the colonies. The considerations prompting their adoption seem to have been

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1 United States Reports, Vol. 107, pp. 64-68, case of United States vs. Teller. The Supreme Court of the United States has held that no pensioner can claim a vested legal right to his pension, but that pensions are the bounties of the government.

2 William H. Glasson, Federal Military Pensions in the United States, (New York, 1918) p. 1.

practical rather than sentimental, emotion being reserved for the service-pension measures enacted in each case many years after the close of the war to which they applied. The table on the following page shows the number of years after the close of the wars that elapsed before a general service-pension was enacted. In all of America's important military operations the bulk of the fighting forces has been made up of citizens called from the plow, factory, workshop, and the counter, and it has been necessary to reassure them in advance in order to persuade them to come and to keep them contented while in military service.[3]

Other reasons for the existence of pensions as exhibited in the laws are usually found in one or more of the four following propositions: (1) that pensions are given to provide for the support of those who are disabled in the service of the government or to provide for the families of the deceased veterans as a mere matter of justice; (2) a recognition that the monthly pay was insufficient for the service rendered; (3) patriotism is stimulated by the thought that the nation cares for its suffering heroes; and (4) a sentiment of gratitude toward those who defended their homes and the homes of others.[4]

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3 United States Statutes at Large, (Washington, 1863) Vol. 12, pp. 566, 620, 758; Idem., Vol. 13, pp. 389, 499.

4 Frank W. Blackmar, "Pensions in Legislation," Chautauquan, Vol. 22, p. 288.

Table I

Showing the period which elapsed after each war (before the Civil War) before a general service pension was provided for the soldiers of such wars.[5]

Revolutionary War	1.	March 18, 1818	Beneficiaries under this act must have been in indigent circumstances and in need of assistance.
	2.	May 15, 1828	Granted to all who served to end of war.
	3.	June 7, 1832	Pension provisions extended to all who served no less than six months.
War of 1812	1.	February 14, 1871	This act required sixty days service.
	2.	March 9, 1878	The period of service reduced to fourteen days.
War with Mexico	1.	January 29, 1887	This act required sixty days service and applied to those who were 62 years of age or disabled or dependent.
Indian Wars	1.	July 27, 1892	This act applied to those who served thirty days in the Black Hawk, Creek, Cherokee, and Seminole wars.
	2.	July 27, 1902	Extended the provisions of the above law to other Indian wars.

5 "Pensions to Certain Enlisted Men, Soldiers, and Officers Who Served in the Civil War and the War with Mexico," House Report No. 6001, 59 Cong., 2 Sess., p. 2.

The pension system as it now exists was a matter of slow development in the minds and hearts of the people as well as in the statutes of the nation. The colony of Plymouth in 1643 enacted that any man sent forth against the Indians should be competently recompensed.[6] Other colonies made similar provisions as need arose.[7] A comprehensive act of Rhode Island in 1718 promised in addition that wounds would be treated at the expense of the colony.[8]

At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War action was taken by several of the colonies.[9] The first ordinance relating to the subject passed by the Continental Congress was on August 26, 1776, promising half pay for life in case of loss of a limb or disability sufficient to interfere with earning a living.[10] The object of this was to encourage enlistment, but unfortunately, the Congress had no funds at its disposal, and the law amounted only to a recommendation to the states.

By a resolution of June 7, 1785, Congress referred to

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6 Plymouth Colony Records, (Boston, 1855) Vol. 2, p. 63.

7 Peter Force, American Archives, (Washington, 1848) Series 4, Vol. 4, pp. 58, 69.

8 Samuel Greene Arnold, History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, (New York, 1860) Vol. 2, p. 61.

9 Force, American Archives, Series 4, Vol. 2, pp. 1163, 1164; Idem., Vol. 5, pp. 578, 724; Idem., Series 5, Vol. 1, pp. 54, 447, 1616; Idem., Vol. 3, pp. 75, 411.

10 Gaillard Hunt and Worthington C. Ford, editors, Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789, (Washington, 1933), Vol. 5, p. 703; American Archives, Series 5, Vol. 1, p. 1616.

the different states the right of judging who of their citizens were entitled to be placed on the list of invalid pensioners.[11] The states refused to take any action, and the very next Congress found itself confronted with the whole subject again. The general government has assumed the burden of adjudication and payment of pension claims ever since.[12]

Records for the early years are not complete, but it is thought that not more than two or three thousand Revolutionary soldiers were pensioned for disability before the law of 1818,[13] conferring service pensions, and removing the requirements of disability.[14]

From the Revolutionary War on up to the Civil War, the question of pensions was an important one in the national government,[15] but with the Civil War, its importance grew tremenduously. With the outbreak of the conflict, the United States Pension Office began to loom up with some faint foreshadowing of the great amount of work it was to have in the future. It had been hard to establish for it a

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11 Hunt and Ford, Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789, Vol. 29, pp. 435-437.

12 United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 1, p. 95.

13 Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 1872, (Washington, 1872) p. 344.

14 United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 3, p. 410.

15 Idem., Vol. 1, p. 95; Idem., Vol. 3, p. 410; Idem., Vol. 4, p. 529; Annals of Congress, (Washington, 1854), Vol. 29 (14 Cong., 1 Sess.), p. 1308; Idem., Vol. 42 (18 Cong., 1 Sess.), p. 1962.

permanent reason for its existence. The office of Commissioner of Pensions, who was to "execute under the direction of the Secretary of War such duties in relation to the various pension laws" as might "be prescribed by the President of the United States,"[16] had been created by an act of Congress approved March 2, 1833.[17] But it was provided that it should continue only till the expiration of the next Congress. It was renewed and extended in 1835 and again in 1840.[18] By the latter act the pension business theretofore transacted in the Navy Department was transferred to the office of the commissioner of pensions, and the commissioner was directed to work under the direction of both the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Navy. By the Act of January 14, 1846, it was expressly provided that it should not exist beyond March 4, 1849.[19] Six weeks before the expiration of the time, however, another act continued the office until further legislation by Congress.[20] The office was transferred to the Interior Department by the act organizing that Department, March 3, 1849.[21]

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16 United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 4, p[illegible].
17 Ibid., p. 622.
18 Congressional Globe, Vol. 3 (23 Cong., 2 Sess.), p. 223 for law of 1835; United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 5, p. 369, and Congressional Globe, Vol. 8 (26 Cong., 1 Sess.), p. 235 for law of 1840.
19 Congressional Globe, Vol. 15 (29 Cong., 1 Sess.), p. 208.
20 Idem., Vol. 18 (30 Cong., 2 Sess.), p. 269.
21 United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 12, p. 392.

The Civil War, because of its magnitude, very promptly cast in the shade the old wars hitherto furnishing the subjects for national beneficence. The regular army of the United States, with a force of 16,367 men,[22] and nothing to fight except camp disease and a few Indians, made comparatively small drafts on the Bureau's bounty. The pensioners of the Revolution became more scarce, and the number of heroes of 1812 grew fewer in number. In its distribution of benefits, therefore, the Bureau of Pensions became most nearly related to the war of 1861-1865. According to the official records, there were 18,038 men engaged in the Revolutionary War, 286,730 in the War of 1812, 78,718 in the Mexican War, 83,993 in the Indian Wars, and 2,213,365 in the Union Army in the Civil War.[23] It was, therefore, only natural that the business of the pension office should increase enormously after the close of the Civil War.

The war not only gave a great impetus to pension legislation but it also brought forth some very important consideration of the lot of disabled soldiers, and led to the adoption of supplementary forms of assistance.

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22 The War of the Rebellion: a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, (Washington, 1899) Series 3, Vol. 1, p. 22.

23 "Pensions to Certain Enlisted Men, Soldiers, and Officers Who Served in the Civil War and the War with Mexico," in House Report No. 6901, 59 Cong., 2 Sess., Vol. 1, p. 6.

Retirement pay was provided for the regular army and navy.[24] Vast areas of the public lands were granted to ex-soldiers as a gift of a grateful nation.[25] Artificial limbs and mechanical appliances were provided for the maimed and disabled.[26] Many thousands of veterans were sheltered and cared for in national soldiers' homes with branches in various sections of the country.[27] The destitute and maimed soldiers were clothed by the national government.[28] When death claimed the veterans, under certain circumstances the government paid the expenses of their last illness and burial and erected headstones to mark their graves.[29] Many of the dead found their last resting place in beautiful national cemeteries.[30] But the pension system is by far the most important provision that was made for the recognition and reward of military services.

At first there was some mendicancy in the large cities. Soldiers on their way home, stranded without money or

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24 George P. Sanger, editor, Public Laws of the United States, (Boston, 1866) Vol. 39, p. 337.
25 United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 12, p. 392.
26 Statutes of the United States of America, (Washington, 1883) Vol. 47, p. 322.
27 United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 13, p. 389; Idem., Vol. 14, p. 10.
28 Idem., Vol. 15, p. 1.
29 Idem., Vol. 14, p. 353.
30 Frederick H. Dyer, A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion, (Des Moines, 1908), p. 19.

friends in the early days of the war, before means for helping them had been organized, naturally resorted to begging. The sight of numerous invalids, weak and feeble, on streets and on the trains and in other public places, greatly inflamed the public imagination. Therefore, numerous appeals were made for creating asylums and homes for a great army of sick and disabled soldiers. As these sights disappeared from the streets--probably because of the measures organized by the Sanitary Commission[31] and others to help discharged soldiers in getting back home--the public disposition changed and the craze for homes for the soldiers abated. The soldiers themselves, moreover, showed little inclination to avail themselves of the opportunities for institutional care which were offered.[32] The general disposition of men in the Veteran Reserve Corps to seek discharge, as 90 per cent did,[33] was regarded as evidence of the abundance of opportunities open to the soldiers in civil life.

During the war, acts were passed granting liberal pensions to disabled veterans and dependents of those killed

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31 Sanitary Commission Bulletin, (New York, 1866) Vols. 1, 2, and 3 (November 1, 1863-August 1, 1865).

32 Edward Thomas Devine, Disabled Soldiers and Sailors Pensions and Training, (New York, 1919) p. 43.

33 Ibid., p. 45.

in the service.[34] Also a military and naval hospital was established before the war was over.[35]

When the war ended and the government started in to find out who had been permanently injured in its defense, it had to employ medical examiners.[36] And at that point politics and a false economy worked their most baneful influence. The position of examining surgeon for pensions became a reward for political activity in the interest of the party in power. But worse still is the fact that the niggardly fees established by the government in payment for examinations and reports on the physical condition of applicants for pensions made it utterly impossible to secure anything like the best medical skill and experience.[37] Whatever resentment that has existed in the country on the subject of pensions has been directed against the notion that a recognition of service on the part of the nation should be used as a pork barrel by the unscrupulous.

As to the pension abuses, they may be said to begin properly with the Arrears of Pensions Act of 1879[38] which

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34 United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 12, p. 566; Ibid., p. 758; Idem., Vol. 13, pp. 389, 499.

35 Ibid., p. 509.

36 Annual Report of the Department of the Interior, 1907, Vol. I, p. 273.

37 United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 51, pp. 188, and 370.

38 See appendix I.

President Hays weakly signed against the strong opposition of Senator Sherman, who was probably then the most prominent member of his cabinet.[39] In 1862, the law had been that pensions should begin from the date of discharge from the service, if the claim had been filed within one year from that date.[40] If the claim had not been filed within one year of discharge, the pensions were to begin from the date of filing the claim. In 1864, the time within which a claim filed might secure arrears was extended to three years,[41] and in 1868, to five years.[42] And there it rested, everybody being satisfied that five years was long enough for a man to find out whether he had been disabled or not. The pressure for a change did not come from the soldiers. General Joseph R. Hawley declared this, and he probably knew the minds of soldiers as well as anyone.[43] He said that the stimulus started from Washington, and went out into the country to come back to Washington again.

It was the Arrears Act that opened the flood-gates. Thousands of veterans had never applied for pensions. Then

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39 Theodore E. Burton, John Sherman, (Boston, 1906).
40 United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 12, p. 566.
41 Idem., Vol. 13, p. 379.
42 Idem., Vol. 15, p. 235.
43 L. W. Bacon, "Pensions a Raid on the Treasury," Forum, Vol. 6, p. 540.

suddenly by act of Congress they were offered, not a comparatively small monthly payment, but a big lump sum of money representing arrears. It was an enormous bait. It was patronage on a national scale. Even with that, pensioners asked for more money and applicants shut out by restrictions secured the removal of the same. Modification after modification let down the bars lower,[44] till, in 1890, the ninety days' service act placed upon the rolls a great host of invalids, who claimed no disability as originating in service, and whose pension privilege extended also to their wives and minor children.[45] This law did not make any distinctions between the financial conditions of the widows, but they had to show that their husbands' deaths were due to their services. In case a soldier was not survived by his wife but by legitimate children under sixteen years of age, the children were entitled to the same pension as the widow might have received.

The period of the Cleveland and Harrison administrations offers perhaps the best opportunity to study the factors that caused the unusual growth of the pension system. These forces include: (1) the soldier vote;

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44 United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 14, pp. 56, 230; Idem., Vol. 15, p. 235; Statutes of the United States of America, Vol. 47, p. 455.

45 See appendix II.

(2) the Grand Army of the Republic; (3) the Civil War sentiment and tradition that persisted in the North; (4) the Washington claim agents; (5) the soldier press; (6) the pension politicians; and (7) the relation of pensions to the tariff question.[46]

From 1884 to 1896 the platforms of the national parties showed unusual interest in pensions as the following statements show.

From the resolutions of the convention of the People's party, 1892: "3. Resolved, That we pledge our support to fair and liberal pensions to ex-Union soldiers and sailors."[47]

From the Republican platform, 1892: "Ever mindful of the services and sacrifices of the men who saved the life of the nation, we pledge anew to the veteran soldiers of the republic a watchful care and recognition of their just claims upon a grateful people."[48]

From the Union Labor party platform, 1888: "Pensions. --We demand the passage of a service pension bill to every

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46 Donald L. McMurry, "Political Significance of the Pension Question, 1885-1897," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, Vol. 9, p. 20.

47 Edward Stanwood, History of the Presidency, (Boston and New York, 1903), p. 512.

48 Ibid., p. 497; Kirk H. Porter, National Party Platforms, (New York, 1924) p. 177.

honorably discharged soldier and sailor of the United States."49

From the platform of the Democratic party, 1892: "Section 13. This convention hereby renews the expression of appreciation of the patriotism of the soldiers and sailors of the Union in the war for its preservation, and we favor just and liberal pensions for all disabled Union soldiers, their widows and dependents; but we demand that the work of the Pension Office shall be done industriously, impartially, and honestly. We denounce the present administration of that office as incompetent, corrupt, disgraceful, and dishonest."50

From the platform of the Prohibition party, 1892: "13. We pledge that the Prohibition party if elected to power will ever grant just pensions to disabled veterans of the Union army and navy, their widows and orphans."51

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49 Porter, op. cit., p. 154; Stanwood, op. cit., p. 490.

50 Porter, op. cit., p. 164; Stanwood, op. cit., p. 502.

51 Porter, op. cit., p. 171; Stanwood, op. cit., p. 507.

Chapter II

THE PRIVATE PENSION ACT ABUSE

By the act of July 4, 1864, a tariff was established for specified injuries.[1] This was a novelty in pension legislation, though a very natural development. Rates were modified, always by increasing them. New catagories were added from time to time, thus many absurdities and extravagances crept into the application of the principle.[2] The farther the country got away from the war, the larger grew the pension rolls.

As was pointed out above, many other things besides the granting of pensions were done for the veterans.[3] And the general pension laws were so ample that one might well ask how it was that such an abuse as the passage of large numbers of special acts grew up. One wonders what meritorious service was done or what peculiar hardships were undergone that the claimants were justified in urging further benefits by way of private acts.

In adjudicating claims for increase of pension under the act of June 27, 1890, the Pension Bureau stated:

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1 United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 13, p. 389.
2 Devine, Disabled Soldiers and Sailors Pensions and Training, p. 34.
3 See page 9.

1. Original pension having been allowed, any subsequent increase of pension must be based on the fact there is increased incapacity for earning a support by manual labor, and must be adjudicated, so far as commencement of the increased rate is concerned, under section 4698½, Revised Statutes.

2. In claims for increase under the act of June 27, 1890, if the declaration does not specify any causes of disability it shall be deemed a claim for increase on account of the causes already accepted; provided, however, that if the examination shall show other disabling causes the claimant shall be accorded the same right to amend his declaration as in an original claim. If new disabling causes are alleged in an application for increase the same averments must be made in regard to such disabling causes as are required in original claims; and in all cases when increase is allowed it will commence at the date of the certificate of medical examination establishing the same. The rule with regard to proof of non-vicious habits applies to the new disabling causes the same as in original claims.[4]

These rules, in regard to the general pension act of 1890,[5] do not seem unjust or hard to meet if the claimant were really entitled to a pension. Also, the Pension Bureau itself has usually been very lenient in letting claims through. But with all this, the pension abuse by special act grew to astounding proportions. Beginning with a just desire to make eligible for a pension people who were technically disbarred, or whose cases were unusual, the abuse grew so that even until in recent years, it was understood that each senator was allowed as many as

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4 Treatise on the Practice of the Pension Bureau Governing the Adjudication of the Army and Navy Pensions, (Washington, 1898) p. 101.

5 See appendix II.

seventeen special acts, and each representative twelve.[6] Most of these acts simply increased the pensions of those who were already drawing them

The special act is, of necessity, personal, discriminating, and partial, and as such provokes a feeling of resentment in the minds of those who, equally deserving, have not the acquaintance, influence or the knowledge of the means necessary to secure similar benefits. It is expected, perhaps, that the number of special acts should increase rather than decrease with increasing numbers of beneficiaries under the general laws. Many a person is prompted to seek a pension or increase of pension less by a positive sense of title and desert, or of injustice suffered than by a comparison of his own status with that of some one who is in receipt of something which he has not.[7] In such cases where an increase of pension is asked, the claim is usually made that the circumstances of the particular applicant justify a rate higher than that normally paid.[8] But it is fairly obvious that such increases are due more to the favor of members of Congress than to any just and

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6 Walter Lippmann, "Gratitude and Graft," Everybody's, Vol. 25, p. 246.

7 T. F. Dennis, "Anomalies of Private Pensions," Forum, Vol. 15, p. 384.

8 Congressional Globe, (42 Cong., 1 Sess.) Vol. 44, p. 217; Congressional Record, (55 Cong., 3 Sess.) Vol. 32, pp. 870-880.

careful comparison of the merits and necessities of the applicants with those of other pensioners receiving the same allowance. The passage of a certain number of private pension acts became practically a perquisite of Senators and Representatives to be used according to the dictates of influence, acquaintance, or political expediency.

The Commissioner of Pensions in his annual report for 1888, shows how the special acts are handled after being passed by Congress and sent to the President for approval:[9]

> Upon the receipt at the Executive Mansion of a special act granting pension it is referred through the office of the Secretary of the Interior to the Commissioner of Pensions, whose duty it is to present for the consideration of the Executive all the facts, favorable and unfavorable, shown in the records and files of the Bureau of Pensions concerning such case....To this end calls are made upon the Adjutant-General and Surgeon-General for their reports, to complete the military history of the claimant, if such history is not already in the case; the claimant's own declaration is briefed and every statement that he has made in his own behalf is set forth. The substantial evidence in support thereof is added, as well as that which is adverse thereto.
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> These reports are fully examined by the chiefs of the boards of Review and Re-review, to the end that errors may be corrected. The briefs thus prepared are transcribed and submitted to the Commissioner of Pensions, who examines them....When this work is so done, it is forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior,

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9 It is probably that Cleveland was largely responsible for this method since he tried to find out the facts of the cases before approving or disapproving the special pension acts.

and by that official to the President.[10]

This letter shows the thoroughness with which the special acts were handled by the Pension Bureau.

Akin to the special pension laws were a great number of acts to correct the military records of ex-soldiers who applied for pensions. One of the rules of the Pension Bureau states that "a claimant against whom there stands a charge of desertion under an enlistment for service in the war of the rebellion, which charge the War Department declines to remove, has no title to pension under any existing law on account of disability incurred in said war or service performed therein. That is, the claimant must have received a discharge from all enlistments for service in the war of the rebellion, and if he was not so discharged, but a record of desertion from any such service stands against him, he is not entitled to pension."[11] When a claim is made that the record is wrong or that there were extenuating circumstances, it is common practice, in the history of private pension act legislation, to pass private acts removing the charge of desertion from the record. It is astounding how many bills have been passed giving honorable

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10 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Pensions for 1888, (Washington, 1888) p. 6.

11 Treatise on the Practice of the Pension Bureau Governing the Adjudication of the Army and Navy Pensions, p. 101.

discharges to deserters.[12] As a matter of history, however, the deserter was referred to with scorn and treated rudely. As a rule, their absence, unaccounted for, was better than their "Present" at roll call. But by acts of Congress, they have been pensioned by the score.

To secure a special act, the person who for any reason whatever surmised that he might be able to obtain a benefit not afforded by the general laws, sought to secure the introduction by a member of Congress of a private bill for his relief. "Any veteran whose claim was too silly or impudent to get passed the pension authorities was at liberty to take it to his Representative or Senator. The resulting bills became as thick as autumn leaves in Vallambrosa."[13] Be the pretext what it may, such a bill was referred to a committee by whom it was considered and reported to the House or Senate, favorably or adversely, or permitted to expire with the Congress. If reported favorably, passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate, and signed by the President, such bill became a

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12 United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 51, pp. i-xviii, 42 honorable discharges granted; Idem., Vol. 55, p. iv, 27 granted; Idem., Vol. 31, p. 2072, 20 granted. These volumes were chosen at random, without any thought of comparing the number of honorable discharges granted at the various Congresses.

13 Allan Nevins, Grover Cleveland, a Study in Courage, (New York, 1933) p. 327.

law; and the party named therein, and he alone, was benefited thereby. The principle involved was simple. The nation had in its Pensions Bureau a virtual pensions court, hearing cases fairly and interpreting the laws in a liberal spirit. Congress, by passing so many special acts, set itself up as a rival pensions court, and reversed hundreds of decisions made by the proper one.

In some Congresses rules have been enforced by the committees under which claims have received reasonable consideration and investigation. In the 56th Congress, 1899-1901, there was a commendable disposition to check the flood of applications for pensions by special act. Detailed rules limiting and governing applications were adopted by the Pension committees of the two Houses.[14] One object of these rules was to secure a prior consideration of every application by the Pension Bureau. At other times the practice has been very lax. In 1888, when the number of such bills before Congress was much smaller than in later years, Senator John R. McPherson of New Jersey said of the methods of the Senate Pension Committee: "The bills are introduced in great numbers (I myself have introduced 200), and they are then referred to the Pension

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14 Congressional Record, Vol. 33 (56 Cong., 1 Sess.), p. 2681.

Committee. This Committee divides the bills equally among its members, and each one is supposed to examine a certain number of bills. Instead of giving each bill a careful investigation, I know, as a matter of fact, that in many cases the Senators have merely turned over the batch to their secretaries, and have instructed these clerks to look into the matter."[15]

When many thousands of applications for special pensions are before Congress, thorough investigation by a congressional committee or its employees is obviously out of the question. When the Pension Bureau has been called upon, it has usually been able to furnish certain of the essential facts.

It was the custom of both branches of Congress to set aside portions of certain days for the consideration of pension bills. The House of Representatives set aside Friday evenings for enacting them.[16] In the great majority of the cases, the private pension bills received no consideration other than that given by the committee. On "pension day" there was commonly no quorum present. In the presence of a few members, it was a general practice to

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15 Glasson, Federal Military Pensions in the United States, p. 276.

16 Congressional Record, Vol. 32 (55 Cong., 1 Sess.), p. 870.

take up the pension bills reported by the committee and put them through the form of passage in a perfunctory manner and with remarkable speed. In some Congresses they have been passed at the rate of two or three a minute. For instance, on July 25, 1888, the Senate passed 130 private pension bills in 50 minutes, an average of one in 23 seconds.[17] The Senate in a single field-day, April 21, 1886, voted some four hundred of them.[18]

Very few members took the trouble to vote on such occasions or gave any attention to the procedure, which was by general consent. Occasionally some disgusted Southern member, or some one who had a grievance, stopped the process temporarily by insisting on the presence of a quorum. This reckless method of doing business, originating at a time when the surplus in the Treasury seemed capable of satisfying every demand for pensions, resulted in the allowance of many unworthy claims.

Recognizing the scandal attached to the special-act log-rolling process, a tendency arose to increase the scope of the general laws, if for no other reason than to avoid criticism of prevailing practices. General pension

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17 Glasson, Federal Military Pensions in the United States, p. 276, from New York Times, August 7, 1888.

18 Nevins, Grover Cleveland, a Study in Courage, p. 327.

acts grew more liberal with time, yet the special acts did not decrease but increased by the hundreds. The number of private pension bills that has been introduced in the various Congresses is truly enormous. In the 61st, 1909-1911, the number reached the astounding figure of 9652 which is the high mark of all times, and as late as the 70th Congress, 1927-1929, the number was 7589, the second highest figure. The high record made by the 61st Congress may be compared with a total of 8367 pensions granted by special act by all the Congresses in the period of forty years from March 4, 1861, to March 4, 1901. The table on the following page shows the trend of the growth of the number of special acts, and the unusual height to which the figures went after the Civil War. On first thought, it may be believed that the wars which came after the Civil War kept the figures high. But the truth of the matter is that practically all of the pensions granted by special act in this later period were for the benefit of the survivors of the Civil War or their relatives. One will notice that although there has been more attention called to the private pension abuse that existed during Cleveland's first administration, actually there were many more of these bills passed in later Congresses than in those between the years 1885 and 1889. It will be seen

Table II

Showing the Number of Private Acts Passed at the Various Congresses.[19]

Congress	Years	Number	Congress	Years	Number
I	1789-'91	22	XXXVIII	1863-'65	29
II	1791-'93	15	XXXIX	1865-'67	139
III	1793-'95	2	XL	1867-'69	292
IV	1795-'97	0	XLI	1869-'71	84
V	1797-'99	1	XLII	1871-'73	177
VI	1799-'01	0	XLIII	1873-'75	178
VII	1801-'03	0	XLIV	1875-'77	97
VIII	1803-'05	5	XLV	1877-'79	229
IX	1805-'07	1	XLVI	1879-'81	95
X	1807-'09	0	XLVII	1881-'83	194
XI	1809-'11	0	XLVIII	1883-'85	512
XII	1811-'13	2	XLIX	1885-'87	798
XIII	1813-'15	1	L	1887-'89	1027
XIV	1815-'17	7	LI	1889-'91	1400
XV	1817-'19	8	LII	1891-'93	211
XVI	1819-'21	2	LIII	1893-'95	119
XVII	1821-'23	1	LIV	1895-'97	272
XVIII	1823-'25	12	LV	1897-'99	993
XIX	1825-'27	24	LVI	1899-'01	1400
XX	1827-'29	4	LVII	1901-'03	2178
XXI	1829-'31	214	LVIII	1903-'05	3356
XXII	1831-'33	39	LIX	1905-'07	6113
XXIII	1833-'35	78	LX	1907-'09	6456
XXIV	1835-'37	116	LXI	1909-'11	9652
XXV	1837-'39	74	LXII	1911-'13	6342
XXVI	1839-'41	23	LXIII	1913-'15	6031
XXVII	1841-'43	97	LXIV	1915-'17	5574
XXVIII	1843-'45	37	LXV	1917-'19	3694
XXIX	1845-'47	77	LXVI	1919-'21	2203
XXX	1847-'49	97	LXVII	1921-'23	2329
XXXI	1849-'51	31	LXVIII	1923-'25	2432
XXXII	1851-'53	58	LXIX	1925-'27	5288
XXXIII	1853-'55	103	LXX	1927-'29	7589
XXXIV	1855-'57	75	LXXI	1929-'31	5691
XXXV	1857-'59	62	LXXII	1931-'33	430
XXXVI	1859-'61	49	LXXIII	1933-'34	43
XXXVII	1861-'63	15			

19 Data for the 1st Congress to the 53rd taken from Dennis, loc. cit., p. 382; data for the 54th Congress to the 73rd taken from United States Statutes at Large, Vols. 28-48.

from the table that private pension acts are co-existent with the constitutional government of the United States. The First Congress enacted 22 such measures. And it can also be seen that during the Civil War, and to some extent, the War of 1812, the granting of special pensions was noticeably reduced. While these great crises were going on, the attention of Congress was necessarily centered on matters of public interest to the exclusion of those personal and private.

Chapter III

PRESIDENT CLEVELAND AND HIS PENSION VETOES

It has ever been easy to arouse popular excitement upon the subject of the treatment of wounded or disabled soldiers, and this noble sentiment has been often played upon by designing men. Moreover, the Democratic party has always been compelled to deal with more than usual caution with the question when it affected soldiers who served in the Federal ranks during the Civil War, as any unwillingness to pass pension bills for such soldiers was certain to be interpreted as reflecting sympathy for the lost cause. For this reason Grover Cleveland, as he looked over the pension system of the nation of which he was the chosen President, must have summoned all his courage. To allow the scandals which had developed to pass unrebuked was impossible for a man with his views of the duty of a President; to attempt to end them was to bring down more abuse from his enemies in both political parties. Here was a subject worthy of a President's best efforts. For to reform such a system would not only be to stop the robbery of the public treasury, but would remove from a noble body of heroes a stigma which the selfish designs of

unworthy schemers had fastened upon it.[1]

President Cleveland undertook to examine into the merits of the private pension bills so far as possible, and to veto those that he considered objectionable. However, presidents have been sparing in the use of the veto against private pension bills. President Grant vetoed five measures of this sort.[2] The increasing number of special pension acts and the carelessness with which they were passed caused President Cleveland to interpose the executive power against this growing abuse. Instead of signing such bills perfunctorily, he had them investigated and vetoed grants that he thought without merit. In his first term the number of special pension acts that became law was 1,825.[3] Many of these were permitted to become law without his signature. During the same four years, Cleveland vetoed 250 such measures.[4] Many of these bills were vetoed on the ground that the injuries alleged were not received in service or line of duty. In another class of cases, because of a fault in the bill or because of the operation

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1 Robert McElroy, Grover Cleveland, (New York, 1923) Vol. 1, p. 189.

2 James D. Richardson, A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Washington, 1898) Vol. 7, pp. 172, 320, and 384.

3 See Table II.

4 Richardson, op. cit., Vol. 8, pp. 409-488, 539-569, 635-740, 816-843.

of some general law, the President thought that the special acts would have been of no benefit to the claimants. In one of his veto messages he says:

> If the information furnished concerning this soldier's service is correct, this claim for pension must be based upon a mistake. It is hardly possible that wounds such as are alleged should be received in battle by a second lieutenant and no record made of them; that he should seven days thereafter receive a leave of absence for other sickness, with no mention of these wounds, and that a medical certificate should be made (probably with a view of prolonging his leave) stating still other ailments, but silent as to wounds. The further facts that he made no claim for pension and the claim of his widow was long delayed are worthy of consideration. And if the wounds were received as described there is certainly no necessary connection between them and death fourteen years afterward from neuralgia of the heart. ...It is not a pleasant thing to interfere in such a case; but we are dealing with pensions, and not with gratuities.[5]

Other vetoes were on the gound that proposed increases were not warranted, that dependency alleged was not established, that the applicants were deserters, and that the applicants were unworthy for miscellaneous reasons. A great deal of ridicule came to one who said that he had been wounded in the leg in a certain skirmish, though at the time he was absent on sick leave, and who, twenty years later, induced Congress to vote him a pension because he had recently broken that leg in stepping across a ditch while gathering dandelions; to another who had contracted

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5 Ibid., p. 424.

rheumatism in the inhospitable climate of Port Tobacco within the state of Maryland; to another who had made an attempt to include sore eyes among the results of diarrhea; to many who, while riding, sustained injuries from the horns of army saddles. The number of such instances in this last case led the President to conclude that "those saddles were very dangerous contrivances."[6]

Mr. Cleveland, while anxious that the country should show not only a just but a generous appreciation of the services of the country's defenders, was determined that so far as was possible the money appropriated for pensions should be devoted to those who had suffered in the nation's service, and that such men should never find themselves on the pension rolls beside those who had attributed their natural ills to service in the army. When he discovered fraud his comment was often caustic. Nowhere else in the messages and papers of the presidents is to be found so much ironical writing as in the memoranda of this grave and unflinching man as he returned these pension bills to the Senate and the House of Representatives. His brief, pointed veto messages were so good that it was a pity he weakened their effect by occasional gibes or

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6 Ibid., p. 439.

ridicule. The exerpt from the veto message given above,[7] and the one quoted below show his seriousness in trying to combat fraud:

> There still remained an appeal to Congress, and probably there were not wanting those who found their interests in advising such an appeal and who had at hand Congressional precedents which promised a favorable result. That the parties interested did not miscalculate the chances of success is demonstrated by the bill now before me, which, in direct opposition to the action of the Pension Bureau, grants a pension to a man who, though discharged from enlistment for a certain alleged disability, made two applications for a pension based upon two distinct causes, both claimed to exist within two months prior to such discharge, and both different from the one upon which he accepted the same, and not withstanding the fact that the proposed beneficiary, after all these disabilities had occured, passed an examination as to his physical fitness for reenlistment, actually did reenlist, and served till finally mustered out at the close of the war.
>
> If any money is to be given this man from the public Treasury, it should not be done under the guise of a pension.[8]

It was at once urged against Cleveland's pension vetoes that they represented a waste of the President's time; that he showed a lack of proportion in laboring till nearly dawn over trivial legislation when large policies called vainly for his time. But the labor which so forcibly illustrated one or two great principles of sound government can hardly be said to have been wasted. It was also urged that he hardly checked the evil, for special pension bills

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7 See page 30.
8 Richardson, op. cit., p. 420.

were revived in great numbers again under Harrison. Although the number of pension bills passed may not have been materially reduced, flagrant impostures became rarer after Cleveland had appealed to public opinion and to the consciences of those Congressmen who happened to possess them. Moreover, his minor vetoes paved the way for stopping completely, if temporarily, a dangerous piece of general pension legislation--the long-pending Blair bill of 1887.[9]

William Bishop, who had been in a post hospital with the measles may have considered himself roughly used when it was revealed that his military record had covered but one month and seventeen days and "as a substitute at a time when high bounties were paid." Fifteen years "after this brilliant service and this terrific encounter with the measles" the claimant had discovered that the disease had settled in his eyes.[10] But Bishop may be held to have fared as well as Andrew Wilson who joined the army a few weeks before the surrender at Appomatox, and came out of the service with a dozen diseases which were carefully enumerated. "Whatever else may be said of this claimant's achievements during his short military career," the

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9 Ibid., pp. 549-557.
10 Ibid., p. 443.

President observed, "it must be conceded that he accumulated a great deal of disability; if there were ailments to which he might honestly lay claim, it was certain that his title to the same was complete before he entered the army."[11]

The vetoes caused a great deal of angry discussion in Congress, as the following speech of Senator Hawley's shows:

> The committee in the other House has a majority of Democrats, in the Senate a majority of Republicans upon these committees are men whose private and public lives are as reputable as that of the President, who are as good lawyers as the President, who are as faithful in the performance of their constitutional duties as the President. I object to comments upon two committees of Congress and the two Houses of Congress of that description from a President who is violating the Constitution by the character of his vetoes.[12]

Mr. Cleveland called attention to the pension abuses in some of his annual messages. In his first annual message to Congress he used the words:

> It is fully as important that the rolls should be cleansed of all those who by fraud have secured a place therein, as that meritorious claims should be speedily examined and adjusted....A revision of our pension laws could easily be made which would rest upon just principles and provide for every worthy applicant. But while our general pension laws remain confused and imperfect, hundreds of private pension

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11 Ibid., p. 450.
12 Congressional Record, Vol. 19 (50 Cong., 1 Sess.) p. 6177.

> laws are annually passed, which are the sources of unjust discrimination and popular demoralization.[13]

Cleveland dealt somewhat extensively with the subject of pensions in his second annual message. He met with a great deal of interested criticism from the old soldiers and Republican politicians, and disinterested from many citizens belonging to neither of these classes. In this message, which demonstrates his feelings against the great numbers of private acts, he says:

> But resort to the Congress for a special pension act to overrule the deliberate and careful determination of the Pension Bureau on the merits or to secure favorable action when it could not be expected under the most liberal execution of general laws, it must be admitted, opens the door to the allowance of questionable claims and presents to the legislative and executive branches of the Government applications concededly not within the law and plainly devoid of merit, but so surrounded by sentiment and patriotic feeling that they are hard to resist....The usefulness and justice of any system for the distribution of pensions depend upon the equality and uniformity of its operation....There are far too many neighborhoods in which are found glaring cases of inequality of treatment in the matter of pensions, and they are largely due to a yielding in the Pension Bureau to importunity on the part of those, other than the pensioner, who are especially interested, or they arise from special acts passed for the benefit of individuals.[14]

These passages, giving a true picture of the situation, struck home to many of Cleveland's enemies. Apparently this was why so many of them raised such a loud cry about his vetoes.

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13 Richardson, op. cit., p. 361.
14 Ibid., pp. 523-524.

While it is true that President Cleveland used the veto to a greater extent than any other president, it is also true that more pension bills became law by his signature than by that of any other president up to that time.[15] He fought the evil tendencies of the pension system with characteristic persistence and courage; but he put the Democratic party at a disadvantage in this respect. Northern Democrats were embarrassed by a conflict of interests. If they spent money for pensions and so made it more difficult to lower the tariff, they might gain the soldier vote but they would offend tariff reformers. If they reduced the revenues there would be less money for pensions; this would please those in favor of free trade, but would offend the soldiers.

Mr. Cleveland's political opponents made the pension vetoes a prominent issue in the campaign of 1888. The vetoes were denounced in both the Republican platform and in the campaign textbook. The National Tribune, probably the most widely circulated organ of the pensioners and claimants, made repeated attacks on the President. For instance, on September 27, 1888, it said:

> An unprecedented number of these [private pension acts] have been presented to Mr. Cleveland for his signature, and he has found in them a boundless field for ridicule, cheap wit, sarcasm, satire, and vituperation of the unfortunates who were so indiscreet as to

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15 See Table II.

> go into the army and lose their health or lives.... The President has been amusing himself for years writing vetoes. The veterans now have a chance to use their hands at vetoing. Let them improve the opportunity.[16]

The determined stand of Cleveland against the abuse of special-pension legislation had the effect of bringing to the attention of the country the recklessness of Congress in such matters and of securing for a time at least the more careful investigation of private pension claims in the congressional committees. Though the Republican 51st Congress--the first of President Harrison's administration--passed 1400 private pension acts, the party was committed to liberality in this direction by reason of its criticism of Mr. Cleveland's record.[17] In the second half of the Harrison administration the House of Representatives was overwhelmingly Democratic, and only 211 special pension acts were passed.[18] Mr. Cleveland's successors in the Presidency have not emulated his record of opposition to private pension bills.

After the panic of 1893 there was no surplus to distribute, and Cleveland was spared the necessity of further

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16 Glasson, Federal Military Pensions in the United States, p. 278.

17 Congressional Record, Vol. 19 (50 Cong., 1 Sess.), pp. 6175, 6177.

18 See Table II.

vetoes. With the disappearance of the surplus and the emergence of the absorbing free-silver question, pensions declined to the position of a minor issue, of more interest to the professional vote getters and to the expectant beneficiaries than to the public at large.

Chapter IV

THE INFLUENCE OF THE G. A. R. ON PENSION LEGISLATION

The Grand Army of the Republic came into existence not long after the close of the war. The organization was established with good motives and for excellent purposes. The founders of the order were a mild, sentimental set of physicians and clergymen whose ideas were bounded by a kind of camp-meeting horizon and under whose guidance the little army would soon have been lost. Men of action seemed to shun the "Grand Army." In 1881, General Louis Wagner took his seat as commander-in-chief, and the new era began. He rearranged and consolidated the general and financial organization and breathed the spirit of life into the dry bones of the Grand Army, which from that time prospered.[1]

It was not long, however, before ambitious politicians perceived that such an organization might easily be used to further partisan and personal ends. The majority of the members were Republicans, and it was plain that if the leaders of the order in any state could secure its backing for their ambition, they could establish strong claims to the favorable regard of Republican conventions. The rank

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1 Charles M. Leoser, "Grand Army as a Pension Agency," Forum, Vol. 15, p. 526.

and file of the order also came to see that if they should present a solid front, they could make demands upon legislators and congressmen which time-serving officials would readily honor. If the Grand Army indorsed a particular pension scheme, for example, the vengeance of the whole body could be invoked upon any man in public life who interposed any objection to its becoming a law. Both the officials and the privates of the Grand Army thus came to see that the organization offered excellent opportunities for promoting selfish interests. For, while it is true that all pensioners were not actual voters, it is equally true that those who were not voters, when it came to political action, are very formidable factors. Women are probably worse to run up against than an equal number of the opposite sex.[2] As petitioners for relief, women are apt to both tearfully importunate and persuasive; men, when not sympathetic, are notoriously good natured. As a class the pensioners, whether male or female, act as a unit; and exciting the hostility of the pensioners is to a politician like challenging an organized phalanx actuated throughout

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2 Many women pensioners are now voters.

by the strongest motives of self-interest.[3]

The Grand Army of the Republic became the principal channel through which the wants of the soldiers were made articulate. The voters of the national encampment of this order showed better than anything else what the members and the other soldiers desired.[4] From 1881 on, the Grand Army maintained active lobby through its committee on pensions, which endeavored to procure from Congress the legislation advocated by the organization.[5]

In 1881, on the motion of Paul Brodie of the District of Columbia, a committee of thirteen was appointed "to inquire into the subject of pension claims and to report their recommendations to the commander-in-chief." The next year, James Tanner, of New York, reported to an encampment of two hundred and twenty-six departments that the recommendations of his committee had resulted in an increase of 1210 additional government clerks for pension cases, at an added expense to the government of $1,742,430, and recommended the appointment of a standing committee of five to

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3 Charles Francis Adams, "Pensions", World's Work, Vol. 23, p. 327.

4 Journal of the Fortieth National Encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic, (Philadelphia, 1906) pp. 111-116, p. 135; Journal of the Forty - First National Encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic, (Zanesville, Ohio, 1907) pp. 74-78; Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Encampment Grand Army of the Republic, Department of Kansas.

5 McMurry, "Political Significance of the Pension Question, 1885-1879", Mississippi Valley Historical Review, Vol. 9, p. 21.

have charge of pension matters and to "be authorized to speak in the name of the Grand Army of the Republic."[6]

The curious student will note an instructive change in the tone of the resolutions that are seen to slip out of the enthusiasm of the meetings. For example, in 1886, a statement declared: "And we demand the rigid enforcement of section 1754, Revised Statutes, and an amendment thereto, so as to give preference to all honorably discharged soldiers and sailors who are not physically disabled, whether discharged for disability or not, provided that such soldiers or sailors be found competent."[7] This stands out in striking contrast to the respectful request to "those in authority to bestow upon needy soldiers and sailors such positions of honor and profit as they may be competent to fill" which the Grand Army asked for in 1866.[8] But twenty years had intervened!

This self-seeking spirit in the organization of former soldiers was not a spontaneous growth. It was systematically cultivated an promoted by so-called "friends of the soldier"--claim agents and politicians who had fees or political advancement in view. The Grand Army has suffered much from politicians. It claims to be a national and not

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6 Leeser, loc. cit., p. 526.
7 Leeser, Loc. cit., p. 529.
8 Ibid., p. 529.

a partisan body; and yet the leading Republican organ of the Southwest was not afraid to intimate that for a Democrat belonging to that body to be comfortable in it he would do well to renounce Democracy and turn Republican.[9] The natural effect of such slurs was to keep old Democratic soldiers out of the organization and to leave it a mere partisan concern.

The world is sufficiently familiar with the progress made by the pension business under Grand Army stimulation since 1886. The proceedings of the National Encampments of the Grand Army of the Republic are but dreary repetitions of proposals of increase and complication.[10] No resolution was permitted to see the light, except by permission of the Committee on Resolutions, a majority of which was always made up of pension agents. The Noah L. Farnham Post No. 458 of New York City caused a breach in the organization when it refused to abide by this rule and sent to the other posts the following resolution on March 8, 1893:

> Whereas, The only veterans entitled to pensions are those who, by wounds or disabilities incurred in the service of their country, are prevented from earning a living in their respective callings, as they might have done had such wounds or disabilities not

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9 "The G.A.R. Encampment", Public Opinion, Vol. 3 (October 8, 1887), p. 545. The name of the Republican organ mentioned was not given in the article.

10 See page 41, note 4.

been incurred, and whose circumstances are such as to justify them in calling on the country for aid or support, and,

Whereas, The Grand Army of the Republic is an association organized for the purpose of enabling old soldiers and sailors to take care of themselves and each other, and,

Whereas, As much real patriotism may be shown by refraining in time of peace from inflicting unnecessary burden on the country as by coming to her defense in time of war; therefore, be it

Resolved: That any old soldier who applies for or accepts a pension, except under the conditions above set forth, is, in the opinion of this Post, guilty of conduct calculated to injure the good men who were and are willing to give their lives for their country without any reward save the approval of their own conscience and that honorable fame that is due to every patriot.11

The next chapter of this correspondence is a letter dated April 26 of that same year, from the commander of the post to the commander of the Department of New York, in which occurs a declaration of independence on the forbidden subject:

Our resolutions...call attention to the fact that owing to the enormous number of names that have been fraudulently placed upon the pension roll, the country is beginning to look askance upon the whole system and that the Grand Army of the Republic is beginning to fall into disrepute owing to the opinion generally entertained, and growing stronger every day, that it is in danger of becoming a mere tool in the hands of the pension-agents. We thought that it was time for someone to get up and say that there were some members of the Grand Army of the Republic who were not in it for

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11 Allen R. Foote, "The Decisive Breach in the Grand Army," Forum, Vol. 15, p. 462.

revenue only. There could hardly be a stronger demonstration that our views were correct than the very resolution of 1884, to which you refer us.[12] What harm can the public expressions of the views of old soldiers in regard to pensions do anybody but the claim agents?[13]

There then followed three questions which the post sent in and asked to have mailed to the other posts of the department. It was thought that an answer to these questions would be of great service in assisting Congress and the people to form a correct idea of the attitude of the Grand Army towards the interesting question of fraudulent claims.

Nothing came of the quarrel, and the question soon died down. But this breach and its resulting correspondence, two pieces of which have been quoted, show that the Grand Army was undoubtedly under the control of those who were directly interested in putting through large pension expenditures. It also shows that there were a great many old soldiers who were opposed to such action.

Still another instance showing the dominance of self-seeking interests in the Grand Army occurred when President

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12 The resolution of 1884 mentioned is: "Resolved, That all petitions, resolutions and memorials by Posts in regard to pension legislation be required to be forwarded to National Headquarters through Department Headquarters, and that Posts be forbidden to make separate and independent applications to Congress for legislation upon the subject of pensions." Ibid., p. 455.

13 Foote, loc. cit., p. 454.

Cleveland vetoed the Dependent Pension Bill.[14] No sooner was this veto announced than General Fairchild, the head of the organization, issued orders to have all posts express their views upon it, with the evident purpose of bringing such a pressure to bear upon congressmen who at heart opposed the bill, as would force them to vote to pass it over the veto, against their convictions.[15] As a means of "showing their power," the managers next began abusing the President for having done what he conceived to be his duty, and threatening him with insult and even personal violence if he should accept his invitation to the St. Louis encampment. Williams Post, No. 25, of Watseka, Illinois was the first G. A. R. body to put the stamp of officialism on partisan animosity. On the evening of the 4th of June, 1887, the post adopted resolutions in which, among other things, they said:

> Resolved, That we deplore the decision of the President to visit St. Louis at that time in view of his well-known feeling towards the soldiers as manifested in his many and numerous vetoes of private pension bills, and especially his veto of the dependent pension bill. We feel that his presence would be deeply deplored by the old soldiers, and would, in all probability result in publicly ignoring

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14 See page 33, note 9.

15 Petitions from G. A. R. posts to pass the Dependent Pension bill over Cleveland's veto, Congressional Globe, Vol. 45 (42 Cong., 2 Sess.), pp. 1988,1990,2053, 2054, 2098-2101, 2166-2168, 2202, 2203, 2230-2232, 2302, 2303, 2363, 2371, 2372, 2458-2460, 2513, 2590, 2757.

and snubbing him; therefore be it

Resolved, That neither this post nor any of its members will attend the grand encampment if the President attends.16

Two editorials of the time give the views of those lined up on both sides of the question. The first is an editorial from the Omaha Republican and gives an interesting side-light on the Republican opinion on the subject. It reads as follows:

> The discussions now going on concerning the President's relations to the Grand Army will probably result in his remaining away from the St. Louis encampment. It is better so. A scene would be unpleasant, and a scene seems certain if he attends. The grounds of objection to his presence are generally misunderstood, however. They are in no sense partisan but purely personal. In the first place, the President has not been invited to review the procession by any proper authority. On the contrary, Commander-in-Chief Fairchild, the only person authorized to extend such invitation, has distinctly and publicly said that it will be better for him not to come. The invitation was sent out by citizens of St. Louis, who assumed that because that city has been chosen for the national encampment that it was a purely local affair and that its conduct was in local hands. This is in the nature of an error. It is not because Mr. Cleveland is a Democrat that the Grand Army objects to him. There are thousands of Democrats in the organization, just as there were thousands of Democrats in the Union Army. Nor is it primarily because of the fact that he vetoed certain pension bills. He might have done this and still escaped serious criticism. The secret lies in the language of the vetoes, which was extraordinary in its lack of dignity and good taste. It ranged from elephantine humor to flippancy. It was pervaded throughout with an atmosphere of contempt for the men who wore the blue....No wonder the old soldiers object to

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16 "President Cleveland and the G. A. R.," Public Opinion, Vol. 3, p. 209.

being reviewed by him.[17]

The next editorial, from a Democratic newspaper, gives the opposite point of view in public opinion:

> We trust, however, in any event, that Williams Post, No. 25, will stay away from St. Louis as long and as far as possible. Williams Post, No. 25, considers the G. A. R. a machine to reach into the Treasury of the United States and grab out pensions. When it is a question between loyalty to the President and Constitution on one hand and loyalty to the pension grabs on the other, they are loyal to the grab and disloyal to the President....Their patriotism is the old cry of "Largess! largess!!" which resounded in the Roman praetorium when the grand army of Rome assembled to decide whether it would dethrone emperors and give the purple where there was the most money to be obtained for the legions."[18]

The result of the whole thing was that President Cleveland canceled his acceptance to visit the national encampment at St. Louis.

So much for official action. As to the individual action of Grand Army men, which no resolution can control, it was the belief of the members of those posts that took the independent stand that Farnham Post, No. 45 did, that if the entire membership of the Grand Army could have been brought to vote individually on a proposition to amend the pension laws and sweep away the abuses, it would have been found that a large majority of the men would have co-operated with these organizations and declared

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17 Ibid., p. 210
18 Ibid., p. 454.

definitely and unmistakably for the good name and unblemished fame of the whole Grand Army of the Republic.

The G. A. R. continued to condemn Cleveland during the rest of his term, and to influence legislation for several years afterward. A few passages from the official report of the session of 1892 show the position and the stand taken by the men controlling the organization. The commander-in-chief said: "The passage of the disability bill of June 27, 1890, was so munificent in its scope--requiring only the certificate of a physician and the examination by a pension board--no additional legislation was sought by the last National encampment." The Committee on Pensions reported that it had "promptly notified the pension Committees of Congress that it was ready at any time to confer with them on the subject of pensions." The committee also went on to report that "the Senate Committee replied that there would be no occasion for a conference this session. The House Committee, however, unanimously voted to give the Pension Committee of the G. A. R. a hearing whenever requested." The Commissioner of Pensions "explained the workings of his office to the Chairman, and it appears that all is being done that can reasonably be expected....The Committee have attentively watched all proceedings bearing upon the subject of pensions, and have

been ready to take action should occasion require."19

The immense expenditures of the government, the intense activity of agents and demagogues in behalf of the "old soldier" caused a reaction in sentiment; consequently, in 1892 and 1893 there spread over the country a revulsion of feeling. It was evident in the surprising majority rolled in the election of 1892 when the policy of the government was reversed, although the chief reason for this reversal was probably the dissatisfaction with the McKinley tariff. But in all this change there was only a plea for wise conservatism.

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19 Leeser, loc. cit., p. 529.

Chapter V

COST OF THE PENSION SYSTEM TO THE GOVERNMENT

The American Civil War has become a rather remote event in history. When in 1915 the United States observed the semi-centennial of Lee's surrender to Grant, the world was already in the agonies of a gigantic struggle between nations that relegated the civil conflict of America to the list of lesser wars of the past. Men now considered old were unborn when the Union and Confederate armies disbanded and returned to their homes. After seventy years now, each year sees the ranks of the aged veterans of those armies relentlessly depleted by death. But this increasing distance from the period of civil warfare and this passing of the veteran armies was not accompanied by much lightening of the burden of pension expenditures. In fact, until recently it has been true that the farther away the Civil War became removed in years, the greater became the pension outlay consequent upon it.

In order to get a background for the enormous expenditures on account of pensions, it is well to look at the table on the following page, showing a comparison of this pension system with those of other wars. From this table, the magnitude of the outlay for Civil War pensions can be

Table III

Showing the Number of Pensioners and the Amount Expended for the Various Wars.[1]

	Total payments (in $1000) 1790 to June 30, 1933	Number on rolls June 30			Amount paid on June 30 (in $1000)		
		1920	1930	1933	1920	1930	1933
Revolution	70,000	--	--	--	--	--	--
War of 1812	46,208	71	10	7	21	6	4
Indian Wars	58,304	6,228	9,645	9,220	1,746	4,585	4,716
War with Mexico	60,424	2,571	630	415	677	395	285
Civil War	7,698,594	633,729	210,692	149,515	202,586	125,785	98,272
War with Spain	811,819	30,432	217,750	233,270	4,624	83,751	125,306
Regular Establ.	107,215	19,031	19,401	24,366	3,604	4,697	6,400
World War	306	128	81	47	37	15	13
Unclassified	10,514						

1 Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1934, (Washington, 1934), p. 181.

readily seen. These figures are the most recent ones obtainable, and it is interesting to note that it has been only in very recent years that the amount for Civil War pensions has decreased any appreciable degree, and the amount of money expended for World War pensions has not even come within sight of that expended for those of the Civil War.

The Commissioner of Pensions in his annual report for 1888 tells of some studies that he had made in order to determine something of the characteristics of the pension roll. These studies also help me to get a more complete background for the pension expenditures. In the two following paragraphs he tells of the average ages of the pensioners as determined by the studies:

> In order to determine the average age of the pensioners now upon the roll, I directed the chief of each Adjudicating Division to draw, at random, from the files of his division 100 cases filed fifteen years ago, 100 filed ten years ago, and 100 cases filed the last fiscal year, and to give me the general average of such pensioners in such cases. The average age determined by this hap-hazard count of the 1,500 cases was fifty years, within a few days.[2]
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> I directed that a count be made and a report rendered of every person upon the pension rolls whose death should be reported to the agencies from the 18th day of May to the 17th day of June, 1888. The eighteen agencies reported an aggregate of 839 pensioners whose deaths were reported during that period. The average age of invalid pensioners of the war of 1861-1865 at

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2 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Pensions for 1888, p. 4.

> date of death was fifty-six years; widows of the late war, seventy-five years; pensioners of wars prior to 1861, eighty-two years. The general average of all was sixty-seven years, which may be taken to establish pretty fairly the average duration of the lives of pensioners now borne upon the rolls.[3]

With this in mind, noting that the average of the pensioner in 1888 was fifty years, one would think that there would be practically no one on the rolls drawing a pension because of the Civil War now. But such is not the case. According to the table on the preceding page, there were still 149,515 pensioners of the Civil War on the rolls on June 30, 1933.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, the pension list consisted of 10,709 persons, of whom sixty-three were soldiers of the Revolution and 2,728 were widows of such soldiers.[4] The actual expenditure during the fiscal year ending June 30, 1861, was $1,089,218.75.[5] Under the laws then in force, the number of pensioners was decreasing at the rate of five or six hundred each year.[6]

After the close of the war, the expenditure for pensions increased, attained its natural maximum in ten

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3 Ibid., p. 4.
4 Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior for 1872, p. 345.
5 Ibid., p. 345.
6 Ibid., p. 344.

years, and began a natural decline, since under a just system of army pensions the maximum of expenditure on account of any war is reached within eight or ten years of its close. Thereafter death steadily diminishes the number of legitimate pensioners, and the size of the disbursement on their account.

The maximum of invalid claims filed was reached in 1866, immediately following upon the close of the war.[7] During the next year but 44 per cent., and the succeeding year but 20 per cent., of the number filed in 1866, were presented. Had this ratio of decrease continued, the claims would have been speedily exhausted; but in 1869 the percentage increased to 30 of the maximum year, and further increased to 36 per cent., in 1870.[8] In 1871 and 1872 the number filed were equal to 24 per cent. of the maximum year. The claims presented during and immediately after the close of the war were chiefly for wounds or injuries received or disease which disabled the soldier from returning to his accustomed vocation in civil life. Those made in later years were largely on account of disease which developed to a disabling extent some time after the soldier's return from the Army, and were of doubtful origin.[9]

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7 Ibid., p. 325.
8 Ibid., p. 325.
9 Ibid., p. 325.

The highest number of Civil War soldiers on the roll was in 1898, when there were 745,822.[10] The highest number of Civil War widows on the roll was in 1912, when there were 304,373.[11] According to the table on the next page, the greatest number of pensioners on the roll at any time was in 1902 when there were 999,446. Advancing years and increasing infirmities led many people to make claims for the laws granting pensions. This factor greatly influenced the climb of the pension roll.

In 1866 there had been 126,722 pensioners drawing from the public treasury, all told, about thirteen and a half million dollars annually.[12] As the years passed these numbers increased slowly until in 1873, there were more than 238,000 names on the roll, which called for some $28,000,000 a year.[13] From that time, mortality should have materially reduced the number of pensioners; and if the congressional demagogues had kept their hands off, this would have certainly happened. But the pension-agents--by this time developed into a shrewd and powerful body at Washington--succeeded in persuading the politicians that a big, permanent pension fund could be used with tremenduous effect in

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10 Idem., 1921, p. 55.
11 Ibid., p. 55.
12 Idem., 1872, p. 345.
13 Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1913, (Washington, 1913), p. 620.

Table IV

Showing the Number of Pensioners and the Amount Expended.[13a]

June 30 or year ended June 30	Number on rolls			Disbursements for pensions	Maintenance and expenses (in $1000)
	Veterans	Dependents	Total		
1866	55,652	71,070	126,722	15,450	407
1870	87,521	111,165	198,686	29,351	600
1875	122,989	111,832	234,821	29,270	982
1880	145,410	105,392	250,802	56,689	935
1885	247,146	97,979	345,125	65,172	3,393
1887	306,298	99,709	406,007	73,753	3,753
1888	343,701	108,856	452,557	78,951	3,515
1889	373,099	116,026	489,725	88,843	3,467
1890	415,654	122,290	537,944	106,094	3,526
1891	536,821	139,339	676,160	117,313	4,701
1892	703,242	172,826	876,068	139,394	4,899
1893	759,706	206,306	966,012	156,907	4,868
1894	754,382	215,162	969,544	139,987	3,964
1895	751,456	219,068	970,524	139,812	4,338
1896	748,514	222,164	970,678	138,221	3,991
1897	747,492	228,522	976,014	139,950	3,988
1898	758,511	235,203	993,714	144,652	4,114
1899	754,104	237,415	991,519	138,355	4,148
1900	752,510	241,019	993,529	138,462	3,842
1901	748,649	249,086	997,735	138,531	3,869
1902	739,443	260,003	999,446	137,504	3,831
1903	729,356	267,189	996,545	137,760	3,993
1904	720,921	273,841	994,762	141,094	3,849
1905	717,761	280,680	998,441	141,143	3,722
1906	701,483	284,488	985,971	139,000	3,523
1907	679,937	287,434	967,371	138,155	3,309
1908	658,071	293,616	951,687	153,093	2,801
1909	632,557	313,637	946,194	161,974	2,853
1910	602,180	318,903	921,083	159,974	2,658
1911	570,050	322,048	892,098	157,325	2,517
1912	538,000	322,294	860,294	152,986	2,449
1913	503,633	316,567	820,200	174,172	2,543
1914	470,331	314,908	785,239	172,418	2,067
1915	437,448	310,699	748,147	165,518	1,780
1916	403,120	306,452	709,572	159,155	1,657
1917	369,936	303,175	673,111	160,895	1,563
1918	340,313	306,582	646,895	179,835	1,528
1919	313,140	311,287	624,427	222,159	1,433
1920	285,219	306,971	592,190	213,295	1,395
1921	267,731	298,322	566,053	258,721	1,390
1922	256,918	290,098	547,017	253,808	1,394
1923	253,686	286,070	539,756	263,013	1,992
1924	248,116	277,423	525,539	229,995	1,498
1925	244,886	267,651	512,537	217,151	1,489
1926	246,139	255,584	501,723	207,844	1,436
1927	246,194	243,748	489,942	230,153	1,327
1928	259,030	232,164	491,194	228,966	1,215
1929	259,580	218,335	477,915	229,890	1,277
1930	256,988	207,269	464,257	219,204	1,272
1931	255,562	195,871	451,433	234,420	1,374
1932	251,694	186,247	437,941	232,509	*
1933	242,719	174,121	416,840	234,996	*

* Cost, maintenance, and expenses of pension system included with that of Veterans Administration.

13a Statistical Abstract, 1934, p. 151. Provision for those participating in the World War or their dependents was made by other methods and the expenditures are not included in this table except in the case of a few individuals whose claims were based on disability or death resulting from disability of service origin prior to April 6, 1917, and after July 2, 1921.

political work. From about 1873 on, then, there began a systematic, artificial stimulation of pension legislation which has continued practically ever since.

It was not until 1818 that a service pension was granted to the veterans of the Revolution.[14] Under this act over $44,320,000 had been disbursed up to 1858.[15] In 1871, six years after the close of the war, when it would naturally be supposed that every invalid, widow, orphan, or dependent had filed their claims for pensions, the appropriation for pensions, in round numbers, was $29,000,000. In 1875 there was an increase to over $30,000,000; in 1876, $28,951,000, about a million less; in 1877, twelve years after the war, the pension appropriation was $29,217,000. Then by the organized effort already mentioned, instigated and stimulated by claim agents, in 1879 Congress increased the amount to almost $35,000,000, over six millions gain. In 1880, stimulated by the success of former years, the agents went to work and secured an increase of over 23 millions, and in 1889, twenty-four years after the war, instead of a decrease, which there should naturally have been, the amount of pension appropriation was $88,275,-113.06.[16]

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14 See Table I.

15 Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior for 1872, p. 344.

16 Statistical Abstract, 1913, p. 620 for the data on expenditures given in this paragraph.

Besides the amount expended for pensions, there was a large body of clerks, surgeons, claim agents, and others directly engaged in the settlement of claims for pensions. The salaries and expenses of this large force for the fiscal year ending June 30th, 1888, amounted in the aggregate to $3,515,000.[17] The total amount expended by the Bureau of Pensions during that year was $82,466,000, being 21⅛ per cent of the Government's estimated gross income, $380,000,000; and 31 per cent of the entire expenditures, $267,924,801, of the United States for the same period.[18]

President Harrison appointed a favorite of the Grand Army of the Republic, James Tanner, to be head of the Pensions Bureau, when he came into office. His activities in re-rating the pensions resulted in a rebuke by the Secretary of the Interior, and shortly thereafter in his removal by Harrison[19] Tanner is said to have remarked "God help the surplus!" when he went into office.[20] Before he was removed, he astounded even those who believed that the country ought to be bankrupted, if necessary, to pension every man, woman, and child who had any connection with the

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17 See table IV.

18 Statistical Abstract, 1934, p. 160.

19 Annual Report of the Department of Interior, 1907, Vol. 1, p. 262. Tanner was removed in October, 1889, after having been appointed in March of the same year.

20 Allan Nevins, American Press Opinion, (Boston and New York, 1928) p. 396.

Union Army during the war. He took the bit in his mouth, so to speak, and ran the office independently of precedent and of any other principle than that the surplus had to be emptied into the pockets of all those who wanted pensions, whether deserving them or not. He made some decisions in his office as Commissioner of Pensions which were important in the administration of that office. One was that the mothers of runaway slaves who were injured while in service in the Federal army should receive pensions. Another, even more absurd, was that when any soldier who served in the war died of delirium tremens, those dependent on him should be pensioned, because, according to him, the inference of the law is that he contracted his love of liquor as a soldier, and that as he died from the effect of drinking, the deprivation of his family of their means of support was the clear result of his service as a soldier.[21] Of course, all this took a great deal of money.

When the general dependent pension bill was passed in 1890, the total annual pensions expenditure quickly mounted above $100,000,000.[22] (Harrison had unwisely said that it was "no time to be weighing the claims of old soldiers with apothecary's scales.")[23] The act of 1890 not only

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21 Ibid., p. 396.
22 See table IV.
23 Nevins, op. cit., p. 396.

greatly increased the amount of the appropriations necessary to meet the increased number of claims under it, but also the amount necessary for the expenses of the Pension Bureau. An act, August 29, 1890, increasing the clerical force in order to carry out the provisions of the act of June 27, has the following provisions: Interior department, 438 at $402,215; War department, 163 at $79,728.34; Navy department, 2 at $2,600; Treasury department, 12 at $13,542.47.[24] The pension claims took a far greater amount of money than even those making liberal estimates had calculated, as an act of Congress, June 14, 1892, shows. This act makes a deficiency appropriation, for army and navy pensions, of $7,674,332, on account of the fiscal year 1892.[25]

No other country has dealt so liberally and ungrudgingly with the survivors and widows and other dependents of its wars.[26] The official figures bear eloquent testimony to the fact that the Republic has not been ungrateful. In the period from 1892 to 1897 inclusive, the entire receipts from internal revenue were $878,907,000 and the receipts from customs revenue $1,001,362,000.[27] This is

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24 United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 51 p. 370.
25 Idem., Vol. 52, p. 50.
26 "The Foreign Pension Systems, A Brief Synopsis of the Pension Laws (not Civil) of Foreign Nations," J. L. Davenport, compiler, Senate Document No. 56, 57 Cong., 1 Sess., Washington, 1902.
27 Statistical Abstract, 1934, pp. 151, and 160

about 97 per cent of the total receipts of the government from internal revenue, or 87 per cent of the total customs receipts. These statistics seem suggestive of a connection between high tariff laws and lavish pension provisions.

In 1902 through the agency of the pension system money went from the National Treasury into the pockets of one person in every seventy-six of the population.[28] The amounts appropriated by Congress for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1902 for the pensions system were as follows: army and navy pensions, $144,000,000; fees and expenses of examining surgeons, $700,000; salaries and expenses of pension agencies, $545,230; investigation of claims, $400,000; salaries for pension office, $1,971,210; salaries for special examiners, $195,000, making a total of $147, 811,440 on account of pensions.[29] To take by law this sum from the pockets of all the people by taxing sugar, tobacco, distilled spirits and imported goods, and to turn this great stream of money into the pockets of pensioners, constitutes one of the most notable transfers of money through operation of law of which there is any record. It

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28 World Almanac and Book of Facts for 1924, Robert Hunt Lyman, editor, (New York, c. 1924) p. 363; see table IV.

29 House of Representatives, Document No. 12, 57 Cong., 1 Sess., (Washington, 1901), pp. 76, and 197.

is an open question, moreover, whether the Americans who pay this money in taxes are any richer than those who receive it in pensions.

In 1910, in a time of profound civil peace, full half a century after its existence was last threatened, the United States Government was laying upon every man, woman, and child in the land a tax of almost $2 per year to pay military pensions.[30] It was handing over to a particular class (consisting of almost a million men and women once for a short time directly or indirectly connected with the army) a sum which would in one year pay the entire military and naval expenses of Japan at that time for three years and a half; which, another year, would support the whole British navy--the largest in the world; which, another year would buy the Argentine wheat-crop and leave enough money to pay, the next year, the bills of the German army--the biggest in the world at that time; which, another year, would pay the sum total of the cost of Government of Belgium, the most patriarchical at that time.[31]

The close of the fiscal year 1928 showed but 74,929 of the 2,213,365 soldiers who served in the Civil War in receipt of pension. Of these 31,528 were in receipt of

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30 World Almanac, p. 362; see table IV.
31 William Bayard Hale, "Pensions Carnival," World's Work, Vol. 20, p. 13,487.

$65 per month; 35,902, $72 per month, because so nearly helpless or blind as to need the aid and attendance of another person; and 6,818, $90 per month, by reason of a condition of total helplessness or blindness.

General Garfield who favored a just and liberal pension policy, once said that if the expenditures should ever reach $50,000,000 per year the system would break down under its own weight. The annual pension roll and the cost of administration amounted at its peak to more than five times General Garfield's estimate, which he regarded as an exceedingly liberal one.[32]

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32 S. N. Clark, "Some Weak Places in Our Pension System," Forum, Vol. 26, p. 319; see table IV.

Chapter VI

SOME OF THE EVILS OF THE PENSION SYSTEM

It could hardly be possible that such a gigantic system could be carried on under general laws without cases of fraud. And this has been freely admitted by pension commissioners and sturdy old soldiers in the halls of Congress and elsewhere. A large percentage of mankind have one standard of honesty when getting money out of the treasury of an individual man, and quite another when getting it out of the nation's treasury, which is nothing but the joint property of all men. Many men with little self-respect, who, no matter how vigorous they may be, are eagerly looking for a chance of getting supported at the expense of somebody else. Moreover it must be kept in mind that any chance to get a living at the public expense offers a temptation before which many men who would ordinarily be considered men of self-respect are sure to fall, since it is so easy for any one to persuade himself that he is not able to work when he finds that it is not necessary to work.

The archives of the United States Pension Bureau must contain a great many human interest stories, and the criminal records of the Bureau some interesting tales. For instance, one attorney in Charleston, S.C., who was also a

notary public, found it more profitable to execute affidavits than to represent his clients before the Pension Bureau; because whether a case succeeded or failed, he could always make his notarial fees, whereas, as an attorney, he would get nothing if a claim were rejected.[1] Of 105 claims filed by a Tennessee attorney, only eight were found, on investigation, of sufficient merit to have passed the Bureau if properly prepared; the rest were wholly fictitious, or based on forged papers. He pleaded insanity when brought to the bar.[2]

One of the most notable instances of crime connected with the pension system was that one of William A. Munson, a pension agent of Providence, Rhode Island. Munson was a very accomodating lawyer, who allowed his woman clients to have their quarterly checks sent to his office, where he cashed them for the beneficiaries, saving them much trouble as few of them had enough business transactions to bother about having a bank account. They trusted him to do all their pension business, even to notifying the department when they remarried, and their pension was supposed to cease. Munson profited by this trust greatly. When a

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1 F. E. Leupp, "Defects in our Pension System," Forum, Vol. 31, p. 677.
2 Loc. cit., p. 678.

client remarried, he failed to notify the Pension Bureau, received her check, forged the signature, and drew the cash. In cases of soldier clients he failed to notify the department of their death, and kept on drawing their pensions by the same method as that through which he obtained the widows' mites. His plot was revelaed, through the agency of an anonymous letter sent to the Commissioner of Pensions, claiming that a certain remarried widow was still drawing pension, though remarried for some time. A field inspector for the Bureau learned that while the woman had remarried, she made no effort to conceal the fact, and had not received a cent of pension since her remarriage. It was then found that Munson's operations were so extensive that it required fourteen government inspectors to work for weeks in his district, the center of which was Boston. It was estimated that no less than one hundred and fifteen remarried widows were unintentionally being granted pensions, of which they never saw one cent. Munson was arrested, convicted, and sentenced to serve five years in prison, but he died before his term expired.[3]

Many stories of soldiers leading double lives have

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3 Catherine Frances Cavanaugh, "Strange Stories of the Pension Bureau," The Bookman, Vol. 31, p. 149.

been brought to the attention of the Bureau, through two women bringing application for pension on account of the service and death of one soldier. It then fell to the lot of the Bureau to act the part of disagreeable informant, as well as to decide the merits of the claims. There are many cases in which a widow did not apply at all during her widowhood; but, after she remarried, she applied for the pension back to the date of the death of her soldier husband, and sometimes three or four thousand dollars has gone to the benefit of the second husband.[4]

The story of the man who applied for a pension for injuries received by "taking fright at a false alarm" has become classical. There is another story of a man who drew a pension for total deafness on the certificate of an examining board and was discovered in charge of a telephone instrument. Another man, officially certified blind by the United States Government, was encountered in a jewelery shop engaged in delicate mechanical tasks, with a magnifying glass stuck in his eye.[5] While these cases are, of course, exceptional, their existence even in rare instances is proof of defects in the system. The question, therefore,

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4 H. C. Evans, "Pensions and Pension Laws," Independent, Vol. 5, p. 809.

5 Robert Lincoln O'Brien, "Our Enormous Pension Roll," World's Work, Vol. 8, p. 4773.

naturally suggests itself, "Why is such a system permitted?" The answer is simple enough. That system disburses millions of dollars a year. Wherever disbursements on any account run into the million, the opportunity for what is known as "pickings" cannot but exist.

One of the most important considerations involved in the pension system is its effect on public morals. For example, Congressman Gibson, of Tennessee, of the Knoxville district, a stanch friend of the veterans and long a member of one of the House pension committees, said that if there was in his district an honorably discharged veteran of the Union Army who did not draw a pension, he did not know it.[6] If it is possible that every man residing in that district who served ninety days in the Union Army was in so bad a condition, then the fearful ravages of war have never been half described.

There is a reasonable suspicion as to the motives of legislators who would add to the burden of old wars. It is very easy to grow sentimental over the old soldiers. Those who volunteered deserved praise. But it is votes that these Congressmen have been after, at least partly. They are a fine subject for eloquence and sympathy. And they

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6 Robert Lincoln O'Brien, "Our Enormous Pension Roll," World's Work, Vol. 8, p. 4772.

have votes, more than the nearly half million that they cast themselves, for their sons are often glad to have the monthly help to support their families. Another group that has been interested in keeping the expenditures for pensions high, in addition to the politicians, claim agents, and examining surgeons already mentioned, is that of the large manufacturers. For if appropriations were reduced, there would be a surplus in the treasury. That is not wanted. That would mean a reduction of taxes, and that would fall on customs. The tariff would probably be reduced and that is just what the interests concerned never want. Reduce the tariff, allow foreign commerce, and prices fall, and big corporations are reduced. Besides the immediate beneficiaries of the pension system, the butchers and bakers from the Atlantic to the Pacific were directly interested in pensions. Pension day in many communities was almost as much of a signal for balancing accounts as the Chinese New Year. Every country storekeeper in the pension belt had valued patrons who bought on credit in each quarter up to the amount of their next pension check, which was regularly turned in on its arrival to square the account.[7]

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7 Ibid., p. 4774.

If, in the service of his country, a man sustains an impairment of his earning capacity, it is the duty of society so to care for him that such a loss shall not cause him to suffer. It does not necessarily follow that for such a loss the man must become a pensioner. It should be the first duty of society to recognize not only its obligation to the man, but the man's respect for himself. Instead of placing him on the pension-roll, an effort should be made to find for him some honorable occupation, public or private, in which he can render valuable service, for which he will receive full pay. Military pensions and other allowances after retirement to civil life should be based upon the public benefit reasonably to be expected therefrom. Grateful recognition of past service is not properly transmuted into coin unless there is a fair chance of profit to the whole community in the transaction.

During McKinley's administration, the Secretary of War, on the suggestions of officials familiar with the administration of the pension laws, and having the interest of the soldiers and widows as well as of the Government at heart, took steps to have a record made and preserved of the physical condition at the date of his discharge of every soldier enlisted since the declaration of war against

Spain.[8] If such a record had been made and preserved in the case of every volunteer soldier discharged from the army during and after the Civil War, the claims of survivors and widows of that war might have been settled long before they were, and millions, if not tens of millions, of dollars saved to the national Treasury.

Our pension system is the only form of life and casualty insurance in which the citizen is the insurer and the government the underwriter. But when a nation is compelled to pay its citizens for being loyal, there is no loyalty. That the survivors of the wars should be held in honor, that they should be preferred in all civic stations, and be greeted with unabated applause while they live, goes with the saying. If a nation should forget its defenders it would better first forget itself. All that the people demand is that, in its desire to be kind to those who deserve kindness, the government shall not become indiscriminate and let in the undeserving as well, and that liberality shall not be construed to mean prodigality and riot.

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8 S. N. Clark, "Some Weak Places in our Pension System," Forum, Vol. 26, p. 312.

Appendix I

THE ARREARS OF PENSION ACT[1]

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That all pensions which have been granted under the general laws regulating pensions, or may hereafter be granted, in consequence of death from a cause which originated in the United States service during the continuance of the late war of the rebellion, or in consequence of wounds, injuries, or disease received or contracted in said service during said war of the rebellion, shall commence from the date of the death or discharge from said service of the person on whose account the claim has been or shall hereafter be granted, or from the termination of the right of the party having prior title to such pension: Provided, The rate of pension for the intervening time for which arrears of pension are hereby granted shall be the same per month for which the pension was originally granted.

Sec. 2. That the Commissioner of Pensions is hereby authorized and directed to adopt such rules and regulations for the payment of the arrears of pensions hereby granted as will be necessary to cause to be paid to such pensioners, or,

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1 United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 20, p. 265.

if the pensioners shall have died, to the person or persons entitled to the same, all such arrears of pension as the pensioner may be, or would have been, entitled to under this act.

Sec. 3. That section forty-seven hundred and seventeen of the Revised Statutes of the United States, which provides that "no claim for pension not prosecuted to a successful issue within five years from the date of filing the same shall be admitted without record evidence from the War or Navy Department of the injury or the disease which resulted in the disability or death of the person on whose account the claim is made: Provided, That in any case in which the limitation prescribed by this section bars the further prosecution of the claim, the claimant may present, through the Pension Office, to the Adjutant-General of the Army or the Surgeon-General of the Navy, evidence that the disease or injury which resulted in the disability or death of the person on whose account the claim is made originated in the service and in the line of duty; and if such evidence is deemed satisfactory by the officer to whom it may be submitted, he shall cause a record of the fact so proved to be made, and a copy of the same to be transmitted to the Commissioner of Pensions, and the bar to the prosecution of the claim shall thereby be removed," be, and the same is hereby, repealed.

Sec. 4. No claim agent or other person shall be entitled to receive any compensation for services in making application for arrears of pension.

Sec. 5. That all acts or parts of acts so far as they may conflict with the provisions of this act, be, and the same are hereby, repealed.

Approved, January 25, 1879.

Appendix II

THE DEPENDENT PENSION ACT[1]

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That in considering the pension claims of dependent parents, the fact of the soldier's death by reason of any wound, injury, casualty, or disease which, under the conditions and limitations of existing laws, would have entitled him to an invalid pension, and the fact that the soldier left no widow or minor children having been shown as required by law, it shall be necessary only to show by competent and sufficient evidence that such parent or parents are without other means of support than their own manual labor or the contributions of others not legally bound for their support: Provided, That all pensions allowed to dependent parents under this act shall commence from the date of the filing of the application hereunder and shall continue no longer than the existence of the dependence.

Sec. 2. That all persons who served ninety days or more in the military or naval service of the United States during the late war of the rebellion and who have been honorably discharged therefrom, and who are now or who may hereafter be suffering from a mental or physical disability

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1 Statutes of the United States of America, Vol. 51, p. 182.

of a permanent character not the result of their own vicious habits, which incapacitates them from the performance of manual labor in such a degree as to render them unable to earn a support, shall, upon making due proof of the fact according to such rules and regulations as the Secretary of the Interior may provide, be placed upon the list of invalid pensioners of the United States, and be entitled to receive a pension not exceeding twelve dollars per month, and not less than six dollars per month, proportional to the degree of inability to earn a support; and such pension shall commence from the date of the filing of the application in the Pension Office, after the passage of this act upon proof that the disability then existed, and shall continue during the existence of the same: Provided, That persons who are now receiving pensions under existing laws, or whose claims are pending in the Pension Office, may, by application to the Commissioner of Pensions, in such form as he may prescribe, showing themselves entitled thereto, receive the benefits of this act; and nothing herein contained shall be so construed as to prevent any pensioner thereunder from prosecuting his claim and receiving his pension under any other general or special act; and nothing herein contained shall be so construed as to prevent any pensioner thereunder from prosecuting his claim

and receiving his pension under any other general or special act: Provided however, That no person shall receive more than one pension for the same period: And provided further, That rank in the service shall not be considered in applications filed under this act.

Sec. 3 That if any officer or enlisted man who served ninety days or more in the Army or Navy of the United States during the late war of the rebellion, and who was honorably discharged has died, or shall hereafter die, leaving a widow without other means of support than her daily labor, or minor children under the age of sixteen years, such widow shall, upon due proof of her husband's death, without proving his death to be the result of his army service, be placed on the pension-roll from the date of the application therefor under this act, at the rate of eight dollars per month during her widowhood, and shall also be paid two dollars per month for each child of such officer or enlisted man under sixteen years of age, and in case of the death or remarriage of the widow, leaving a child or children of such officer or enlisted man under the age of sixteen years, such pension shall be paid such child or children until the age of sixteen: Provided, That in case a minor child is insane, idiotic, or otherwise permanently helpless, the pension shall continue during the life of said child, or during the

period of such disability, and this proviso shall apply to all pensions heretofore granted or hereafter to be granted under this or any former statute and such pensions shall commence from the date of application therefor after the passage of this act: And provided further, That said widow shall have married said soldier prior to the passage of this act.

Sec. 4. That no agent, attorney, or other person engaged in preparing, presenting, or prosecuting any claim under the provisions of this act shall, directly or indirectly, contract for, demand, receive, or retain for such services in preparing, presenting, or prosecuting such claim a sum greater than ten dollars, which sum shall be payable only upon the order of the Commissioner of Pensions, by the pension agent making payment of the pension allowed, and any person who shall violate any of the provisions of this section, or who shall wrongfully withhold from a pensioner or claimant the whole or any part of a pension or claim allowed or due such pensioner or claimant under this act, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction thereof shall, for each and every such offence, be fined not exceeding five hundred dollars, or be imprisoned at hard labor not exceeding two years, or both, in the discretion of the court.

Approved, June 27, 1890.

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