

Veterans Affairs Committee Report

To give the house an example of what I mean, one member of the inner circle, the Postmaster General (Mr. Kierans), stood in this place and told me a couple of weeks ago that an additional 27 cents a year charged to each subscriber would recover all of the increased postal charges on the *Legionary*. I am told by the Legion that the mailing bill for this publication, one which is so important to all veterans, will cost in 1970 \$228,000 compared with \$18,000 for 1968, and this because the Legion has been refused reclassification. The result of this will be that those same veterans who need help will be charged this increased cost. This is the sort of answer we used to expect from another minister during the war, the minister of propaganda in another country.

There are many recommendations in the Woods committee report which require immediate implementation. I refer in particular to those directed toward the incapacitated and those veterans whose life span has been restricted as a result of serious injury. These recommendations are sincere and comprehensive and have been assessed with careful scrutiny by experts in various veterans organizations across the country. These experts have already pointed out in their comments weaknesses in some 22 recommendations that have already been implemented by the Canadian Pension Commission or are in the process of being implemented. Other weaknesses exist in several other areas. These weaknesses could be resolved by allowing veterans groups to appear before the committee to give evidence and advice.

There is a special section of the report that deals with Newfoundland, whose veterans are of special concern to me. There are many weaknesses in the test of eligibility for pension of Newfoundland war veterans who served in the United Kingdom in world wars I and II. Under the terms of union it is incumbent upon the government to clarify these ambiguities to avoid administrative delays. This must be done soon because time is of the essence.

Steps must also be taken to deal with the weaknesses in legislation relating to our merchant seamen. The War Veterans Allowance Board has been doing a tremendous job in trying to meet the needs of these servicemen. However, there is a serious need to look at the time limit for applying for pensions. These important citizens have no right to a pension unless their disabilities resulted from enemy action. Consideration should be given

to giving our merchant seamen an opportunity to receive a pension in cases where they have suffered indirectly from enemy action. Consideration must also be given to strengthening benefits for those who served with the Newfoundland forestry units. In this regard it is time we started to take action instead of procrastinating.

The need for action is Canada-wide. The staff of the Department of Veterans Affairs is a very devoted group of experts who continue to dedicate themselves to the support of the war veteran. They are most anxious to carry out the directions of the government through the Minister of Veterans Affairs so as to upgrade those benefits that are so deserved by veterans in need of assistance.

I hope I have made some slight impression on the minds of those responsible for giving direction and for decision-making. I ask them to do the honourable thing in regard to our veterans. Perhaps the government realize their mistake and are a little ashamed to come forward. In this regard may I remind them that we veterans are a forgiving group of people and will accept their apologies with grace and understanding.

Therefore I ask the government to institute the necessary action to implement the principle outlined in legislation that pensions, let us not forget, are paid to our veterans to provide them with subsistence. They are in payment of a debt and, indeed, are a mark of gratitude that we truly owe the veterans of Canada.

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, I believe this is a very worthwhile motion that is before the house today, particularly in view of the fact that over the last three or four years the veterans of Canada have been awaiting with expectation the changes that the government has consistently indicated will be brought forward. We have eagerly been awaiting some decision in regard to the Woods report. I believe this report was just a stalling device on the part of the government; otherwise something would have been done about it.

When the Woods committee was appointed it was given a very short period in which to review the terms of our veterans legislation, and the committee is to be congratulated on the thorough job its members did during the limited time available. The Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Dubé) has since had considerable time to decide whether to implement the recommendations of the Woods report. I am sure the minister will agree that some of