

*Veterans Affairs Committee Report*

would still stand. All this is an additional reason for my wholehearted support of the Woods Committee recommendation that a pension appeal board be appointed.

The government has given a great deal of consideration to increases in federal pensions, old age pensions, retired civil servants pensions, and veterans pensions. I am confident that when the whole social security review has been completed a policy will be established in keeping with our well-rounded national social welfare program.

**Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt that the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Dubé), who is following this debate with the interest I would expect him to show, feels that because he could say that last night he introduced a motion to refer the Woods report to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs he has scored a debating point. I am afraid I must say to him that that is all it amounts to—a debating point. The basic unfairness in the way in which the government has handled the Woods report still stands so far as veterans and veterans organizations are concerned.

● (3:00 p.m.)

Let us take a moment to look at the record with respect to the handling of this very important study of the administration of the Pension Act. As the minister pointed out, the Woods Committee was set up in September, 1965. It soon found that it had more to do than could be done in a few months. Indeed, it was March 22, 1968, before its report was presented to the government. I should also mention another date, namely, March 26, 1968; that was the date on which the report was tabled in the house.

The next important date in connection with the Woods report is September 13, 1968, when the minister was asked in the House of Commons about the reference of the Woods report to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. These are the words he used in reply to the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), and I quote from page 24 of *Hansard* for Friday, September 13, 1968:

In reply to his question may I say it is our intention to have the Woods Committee report referred to the House of Commons Committee on Veterans Affairs as quickly as possible, and to act on the recommendations of that committee as soon as we received them.

I submit, Mr. Speaker, that that statement was very clear and the commitment involved in that statement was clear and solemn.

Later in that same month, on Monday, September 30, the minister was again questioned about the Woods report. As recorded at page 564 of *Hansard* the minister stated:

First of all the Woods report will be referred to the Veterans Affairs Committee. We will have to ascertain what decisions the members of that committee will take before the minister can decide what legislation will be enacted.

I submit that the position of the government in September of last year was very clear. The government promised that the Woods report would be referred by itself to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and the members of that committee would be given an opportunity to study it and make their recommendations to the minister and the government before the government had decided what was to be done concerning the recommendations of the Woods report. That has all been changed, Mr. Speaker. That commitment has not been kept.

On February 3 of this year the minister was asked by the chairman of the standing committee, the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis), when he intended to refer the Woods report to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. At page 5045 of *Hansard* the minister said:

Yes, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to advise the hon. member and the house that at the present time we are preparing a white paper respecting veterans pensions and the Woods committee recommendations. This white paper is being given high priority and we expect later on this session to be able to refer both the white paper and the Woods committee report to the House of Commons committee.

When that reply was given, it seemed harmless enough. However, during the weeks and months that have gone by since then we have realized what a change of position has taken place. Originally the committee was to get the Woods report and advise the government as to what it felt should be done with regard to the recommendations in that report. The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs will not now receive the Woods report by itself, but the Woods report plus a departmental white paper which sets out, before the members have any chance to express their views on the Woods report, what the government is going to do about it.

I have not seen the white paper. I do not know what is in it. I have a pretty good idea it will be a document which will declare that many of the things in the Woods report have already been put into effect in one way or another. It will be a document which will indicate the difficulties and financial problems