

Veterans Affairs Committee Report

Mr. Dubé: The hon. member also expressed his anxiety, and rightly so, about the Woods Committee report and the white paper. He felt that perhaps there might be some kind of camouflage to prevent the Woods Committee report from reaching the Veterans Affairs Committee or some sort of camouflage to prevent these recommendations being acted upon. Perhaps at this time it would be appropriate for me to give him and other hon. members some of the background material in this connection.

First of all I should state that on only three occasions since the origin of disability pensions have persons outside of parliament been called upon and authorized to inquire into the operation of the Canadian Pension Commission or the operations of the predecessor of the Canadian Pension Commission, the Board of Pension Commissioners. There was a review in 1922 by a royal commission which is now referred to as the Ralston Commission. Ten years later, in 1932, a committee chaired by the Hon. Mr. Justice Rinfret and later by the Hon. Louis Arthur Audette was appointed to inquire into the administration of the Pension Act. The third occasion was September, 1965 when my predecessor, the Hon. Roger Teillet, appointed a committee to survey the work and organization of the Canadian Pension Commission. This committee was under the chairmanship of the hon. Mr. Justice Merwyn J. Woods.

The terms of reference of the Woods Committee were broad in scope. The committee was expected to bring in a report in 90 days. The members of the committee, however, discovered that the matter was so complex and the roots of the ramifications so deep that it took them two and a half years to bring down a report. I should point out that these three commissioners were highly experienced veterans, including among the three two very able justices one of whom was a past president of the Royal Canadian Legion. Yet those three people took two and a half years to prepare their report. It is understandable that we should be given at least half that time to bring this report into fruition.

● (2:10 p.m.)

The three commissioners conducted a very extensive investigation into the organization, methods, procedures and interpretations used in the adjudication of disability pensions. The response to the appointment of the Woods Committee exceeded all expectations. As a result, the committee conducted 41 hearings in Toronto, Quebec City and here in Ottawa.

Those appearing before the committee included representatives of 14 veterans organizations, 13 members of parliament, the Canadian Pension Commission, the Veterans Bureau and representatives of the Canadian Armed Forces. The Woods Committee recorded many hundreds of pages of testimony; it carried out research, and finally, after the time-consuming task of evaluating the mass of material gathered, submitted a report of three volumes totalling 1,319 pages. If I recall correctly, the report contained 148 recommendations.

As soon as the report was handed to my predecessor he tabled it and an interdepartmental committee was appointed to study in depth the 148 recommendations contained in the report. The committee of officials completed its exhaustive review. I, of course, had to digest these studies in order to make my own recommendations, which are now under intensive study by the government of Canada. Hon. members will appreciate that any such study, if it is to have any value at all, requires searching analysis; we have to determine the social, legislative and financial implications involved in the recommendations. As I said before, many of the recommendations are complex in nature. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider whether in some cases more appropriate solutions can be found than those proposed by the Woods Committee.

As I have mentioned in the house on several occasions, a white paper outlining the views of the government will be referred to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs for study in conjunction with the Woods Committee report.

An hon. Member: When?

Mr. Dubé: During the session, as I have said all along. The white paper will encompass all the recommendations of the Woods Committee and indicate the government's position on how the Pension Act should be improved to enable it to meet present-day needs. The hon. member asked, "When?" He should look at *Votes and Proceedings* and he will see a notice of motion referring the report of the Woods Committee to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. If hon. members are so anxious to have the Woods Committee report and the white paper referred to the committee, I would expect them to give swift and unanimous approval to that reference when we move the motion. As a matter of fact, if there is unanimous consent I would move the motion right now.