

Veterans Affairs Committee Report

avowed intention to have the committee study the Woods Committee report. The minister then started to hedge on this question. On February 27, as reported in *Hansard* at page 6007, the minister gave the following reply to a question asked by the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall).

Mr. Speaker, as I answered before, the government is now preparing a white paper and both the white paper and the Woods Committee report will be referred to the committee later this session.

That reply would certainly indicate that the white paper and the Woods Committee report would be presented together to the committee. Then, on March 17, as reported at page 6726 of *Hansard*, in reply to a question asking what was happening with regard to the report of the Woods Committee, the minister said:

Mr. Speaker, as I already said, the Woods report has certainly not fallen into oblivion. The government is preparing a white paper to be submitted to the Committee on Veterans Affairs simultaneously with the report—

That is clear enough. On March 24, as reported at page 7007 of *Hansard*, the Minister of Veterans Affairs in reply to a question used the following words:

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, the government at the present time is preparing a white paper on this matter. Both the white paper and the Woods Committee report will be referred to the proper house committee later in this session.

He confirmed that on April 14. Then on April 28, as reported at page 8048 of *Hansard*, the minister in reply to a question about the Woods report said:

As soon as the white paper is ready we shall refer it to the appropriate committee.

The minister's statements are self-explanatory. All through the session we on this side of the house have pressed him to take action on the Woods Committee report. He first said it would be presented to the committee right away. This is standard phraseology on the part of the government; it always says that action will be taken soon or in a few days. The minister told us repeatedly the report would be sent to the Veterans Affairs Committee for study. Suddenly, there was a change in emphasis and he said the report could not be presented to the committee because the government had decided it was not thorough enough and was preparing a white paper on the subject. For this reason, said the minister, the report of the Woods Committee could not be presented to the committee of the house until the white paper had been prepared. He told us this as late as

April 29. Suddenly, we find that all the assertions of the minister that the Woods Committee report had to be supplemented by a white paper are out the window and the report will be referred to the committee. Why?

Mr. Stanfield: Because the policy has again been reviewed.

Mr. Thomas (Moncton): As my leader says, the policy has again been reviewed. I asked the minister a question today and he said the policy would be introduced in this session. We do not know how much longer the session will last, but I do not think he has very much time in which to present the government's policy in this regard.

Mr. Dube: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I never said I would bring in legislation. I said the report would be presented to the committee.

Mr. Thomas (Moncton): I apologize to the minister, Mr. Speaker. At least the report is being presented to the committee; we have that much action from the minister. I vigorously protest the action taken by the minister in this respect. I ask how he can expect the thousands of veterans throughout this country to place any reliance upon his statements. He has been telling us all along that the presentation of the report was delayed because he was waiting for a white paper to be prepared, and the committee could not act on the report until the white paper was presented to it. How can he expect the thousands of veterans in this country to place any reliance on the statement that the legislation will soon be forthcoming? The minister is no longer credible.

Before resuming my seat, I want to make it quite clear that any criticism I have made is directed mainly toward the inaction of the minister. We on this side of the house are perfectly satisfied with the conduct of the officials in the department; they are honest, hardworking, dedicated civil servants and we have no quarrel with them. All we ask is that the minister give them the tools with which to work so they can go ahead and do that which should be done for our veterans. I therefore say to the minister in all sincerity that he should prevail upon those in the cabinet who have apparently been bucking his attempts to introduce legislation which is necessary to improve the situation in which our veterans find themselves. If he does this he will restore some of the shining image he had when appointed to this portfolio.