

Procedure Committee Report

The Minister of Veterans Affairs, the Honourable R. J. Teillet, told the veterans affairs committee last September that his department was preparing legislation for consideration by parliament. "Such legislation", he said, "will cover a large number of items. It may not cover all of the items that we would like to see introduced at this time and, perhaps, certain legislation which others would like to see will not be introduced..." The need to improve the legislation was also acknowledged by Mr. Teillet's predecessors in office.

It is our understanding that there are more than a million veterans of wartime service living in Canada. With their dependants, the total which could be affected by veterans legislation may well exceed four million—approximately 20 per cent of Canada's population.

The Department of National Health and Welfare faces continuously expanding legislation. A combined committee of health, welfare and veterans affairs would, we submit, tend to diminish the attention the committee could give to veterans legislation. This, we suggest, would be a retrograde step in view of the action taken by parliament when veterans affairs were divorced from the then department of pensions and national health.

We hope that very careful consideration will be given by the government to the full implication of this recommendation, and we trust that parliament will continue an independent committee on veterans affairs.

Yours very truly,
F.O. O'Brecht,
Dominion President.

Why has this committee been so successful and why have governments throughout the years accepted recommendations made in reports to this house by this committee? It has been so successful because it is and has been a non-partisan committee, and regardless of the view we have on certain political matters in this house the members of former and the present standing committee on veterans affairs have faced these problems on a non-partisan basis, because they realized they were dealing with problems of veterans and their dependants.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would urge first that this house has a moral obligation to maintain the standing committee on veterans affairs as part of our procedure. Second, I would urge that this committee is a model of effective and co-operative non-partisan effort made by members of all parties having a common objective. Third, Mr. Speaker, we maintain that the reflection of the work of this committee on veterans affairs has enabled the Department of Veterans Affairs to pioneer in various fields, the results of which have been very useful to other departments of government as well as to the workmen's compensation boards and other like departments of provincial governments.

[Mr. Herridge.]

Having made those few remarks I should like to say in conclusion that I hope this house will give very serious consideration to this recommendation and decide to maintain the standing committee on veterans affairs in fairness to veterans and their dependants, and in view of the requests of veterans organizations in Canada.

I shall listen very attentively later on in this debate to the Prime Minister when he is speaking.

Mr. R. N. Thompson (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, my remarks will be very short and to the point, as were the remarks of the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Herridge).

First of all I should like to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, and the committee with which you have spent most of your time during this session in an effort to concentrate on what I think is one of the most important problems and responsibilities of this house. I realize that this has taken a great deal of your time, and for this reason you have not spent as much time in this house as did, perhaps, some of your predecessors. I believe that has been sound strategy. I compliment you and this committee for the 17 reports we have before us.

I should also like to commend you and the other members of this subcommittee who have worked so diligently for providing us with this fifteenth report now under consideration. In this regard I note with some satisfaction the good work done by my colleague, the hon. member for Medicine Hat (Mr. Olson). Let me hasten to add that my compliments are directed to all members of the committee.

I think we in this house ought to regard this work as probably the highlight of this session, because it is the particular responsibility of this parliament to bring about those reforms which are so obviously needed. We tend to blame the faults of this parliament on the minority position in which we find ourselves. I am convinced that if we had a majority government with 150 seats we would have done no better at all because the work of this house has been hamstrung by procedures and rules which probably worked very well once but were never designed to work in the situation with which we are faced at the present time.

So I believe that the entire series of reports is vitally important. We have heard a great deal from the government both in recent months and in past years before they had the