

Supply—Veterans Affairs

The Assistant Deputy Chairman: Estimates of the Department of Veterans Affairs, administration, Vote 1c.

Mr. Starr: Mr. Chairman, I wonder whether the minister would be prepared to make a statement concerning the intentions of the government in respect of veterans pensions so that it will be on the record at this time.

Mr. Teillet: Mr. Chairman, I think I did that at the time I made the announcement. The intention of the government is to increase the pensions 15 per cent across the board effective January 1, 1968. I appreciate the co-operation of members in dealing with these estimates today. We will be able to get the cheques out by the end of the month.

Mr. Keays: Mr. Chairman, could the minister inform us what he intends to do with regard to war veterans allowances?

Mr. Teillet: Mr. Chairman, I also answered that question some time ago. We have considered it and there is no intention to proceed with it at the moment in view of the adjustment which was made previously.

Mr. Fane: Mr. Chairman, I am very glad that we are dealing with the estimates of the Department of Veterans Affairs this afternoon. The veterans of this country have waited a long time for the 15 per cent increase that was promised them by the minister last fall. It certainly is high time this matter was brought before the house. It is too bad that the Woods report on veterans affairs has not been presented. The minister says this is because of the difficulties in translation from one language to the other. I wonder, however, whether that really is the situation. I wonder whether Mr. Justice Woods may perhaps have said something in that report that the government does not like and is afraid to bring before the house.

Mr. Teillet: Mr. Chairman, I do not like to interrupt the hon. gentleman but I think he would want to be fair. No member of the government, including myself, has seen the report. We do not know what is in it.

Mr. Fane: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chairman, I was under the impression that the Woods report had been presented to the minister and that he was in possession of it. I apologize to him for having made a statement which I apparently made out of turn.

The veterans have waited a very long time and feel that this government throughout its
[Mr. MacEachen.]

whole life has not given them proper consideration. Their pensions have been graded according to the lowest category of civil servant. They have not received increases comparable with the increases granted to civil servants. Therefore their pensions perhaps should be again reviewed so that they might be brought more in line with the wages and salaries of the same class of civil servants.

• (4:40 p.m.)

It is unfortunate that veterans pensions are tied to the lowest paid class of civil servants, because our veterans are Canadian citizens who volunteered for the armed services that were brought into being when necessity faced our nation. Not all the people who enlisted were in that low category of civil servant. Some very able men served in the ranks as private soldiers. I have spoken about two of the men who served with me. They were both killed beside me. One was a very noted lawyer—he was a private soldier—and the other was a minister of the Presbyterian church. They were both university graduates and could certainly not be considered as those in the lowest paid class of the civil service. I am not saying anything against the lower categories of civil servants, but I believe that veterans are entitled to more consideration than being tied, so far as their pensions are concerned, to the lowest paid class of civil servant in the government of Canada.

I do not want to belabour the point, Mr. Chairman, and take up too much time because I know other hon. members wish to speak on these estimates. I think it is a very good thing that we have an opportunity to discuss the estimates of the Department of Veterans Affairs this afternoon, and the sooner this item is passed the sooner our veterans will receive the increases in their pensions.

Mr. Chatterton: Mr. Chairman, we are naturally very glad that the government found it possible to bring forward these estimates at this time. I assure hon. members that there will be no delay so far as our party is concerned. I would ask the minister to give us the assurance that the increases in veterans pensions will go out in the March cheques.

There is one point, and only one, that I wish to make. It is with regard to directives that have gone out to Veterans Land Act offices across the country respecting restrictions on loans to veterans who apply for establishment under the Veterans Land Act. According to the directives that have gone out, starting April 1 this year a veteran will