

Veterans Affairs Committee Report

Mr. Francis: The letter from the Royal Canadian Legion to the chairman and members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, dated April 23, 1969, reads as follows:

Gentlemen: We were very interested in the statement made to your committee by the chairman of the Pension Commission on 17 April 1969. In his statement Mr. Anderson dealt with a number of the recommendations of the Woods Committee which according to him have been implemented or are in the process of implementation.

In accordance with our usual practice we analysed the information given by Mr. Anderson in the light of our experience in the field of pension work and the knowledge gained as a result of our intense study of the entire Woods Report.

Knowing the deep interest of your committee members in the Woods Report, we felt that you and your colleagues might find a copy of our analysis of Mr. Anderson's statement helpful in your deliberations. We are therefore providing sufficient copies for each member of your committee.

In the event that further information on this matter is desired we would be pleased to make ourselves available to appear before your Committee.

We are sending copies of this letter with our observations to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and the chairman of the Canadian Pension Commission.

Yours very truly

Mr. Charles H. Thomas (Moncton): Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend my colleagues, the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall) for introducing in the house a motion which gives members the opportunity to discuss some of the problems of Canadian veterans. I also wish to congratulate him on the effectiveness of his action. He has finally smoked out the minister from behind his cloud of secrecy.

Mr. Stanfield: Do not be too optimistic.

Mr. Thomas (Moncton): I will try not to be. It seems to me to be more than a coincidence that this notice should appear on the order paper on the eve of a motion to refer the recommendations of the Woods Committee to the standing committee. So I want to congratulate my hon. friend for his counter-attack in trying to get some action from the minister.

This motion gives me and other members an opportunity to add our protests to the protests of every veterans organization and all the veterans throughout the country who cannot understand why the government has been dragging its feet in respect of such important legislation. I have heard one or two government apologists make the statement that all is rosy and that the department has

[Mr. Deputy Speaker.]

done wonders for the veterans. If this is the case, why then has every veterans organization throughout the country sent letters and telegrams protesting the manner in which the minister has been conducting the affairs of his department? This does not add up. I think it is rather tragic that we have not had more action by this new minister who was appointed to his portfolio with a great fanfare of trumpets. The veterans and veterans' organizations of this country had high hopes that action would be taken because new blood was coming into the department. They believed he would finally get something going in the department, and expected great things to be done for them.

• (3:30 p.m.)

What has happened since the minister's appointment? The great things that were expected have fizzled out miserably. The Woods Committee report was presented to the then minister of veterans affairs in March, 1968. It is now June, 1969, and the minister has taken his first action in connection with a study of that report.

I emphasize what the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) said a few minutes ago. I, too, deplore the methods the minister has used and the action he has taken in this regard. He has not played fair with the committee. He has told the house repeatedly that the study of the report had been delayed in order that a white paper could be prepared and presented to the standing committee at the same time as the report. I refer to the minister's words as reported in *Hansard*. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre dealt briefly with this matter. On September 13 last year the Minister of Veterans Affairs promised that the report of the Woods Committee would be referred to the appropriate committee of this house as soon as possible. He confirmed this on September 30. On February 3, in answer to a question asked by the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis), the minister replied, as reported at page 5045 of *Hansard*:

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.

What has happened in the meantime? It could be that some members of the government did not agree with the minister's