

*Veterans Affairs Committee Report*

light. The subject must go before the committee for discussion. Legislation must be drafted and brought forward. It may well be another year before anything can be done on behalf of our veterans. Surely it is reasonable to suggest that an interim supplementary allowance be made to these people who are experiencing such hardship in the present circumstances.

● (2:40 p.m.)

The suspicion arises that the government is not only producing a white paper but is drafting legislation in advance of hearings. We are suspicious because of the treatment that has been given the report of the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications. We remember that the transportation legislation had already been drafted by the government even before the report was presented. We are also witnessing the sad spectacle presented by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro) who has told the house that his department has already made up its mind in regard to legislation on smoking and health. In light of this, our veterans organizations that wish to present their views on the Woods committee recommendations to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs have good reason to fear that they will be unable to do so or that their recommendations will not be embodied in the legislation which is to come about.

Ten of our national veterans organizations have joined in preparing a united brief which they hope to present to the Veterans Affairs Committee. However, since this opportunity has been denied them for some time now their recommendations have been mailed to each member of the house. They put forward four major considerations that should be uppermost in the mind of the government. The minister knows what they are and does not need to be reminded of them, but I should like to place them on *Hansard*.

First of all, they recommend that there should be an independent pension appeal board and, second, that more adequate compensation should be paid to our Hong Kong veterans. I was glad to hear the minister say that he was sympathetically disposed toward these veterans, even though he had not had first-hand experience of their plight, as I have. Third, they recommend that there be more adequate compensation for pensioners who are suffering from multiple disabilities. I believe the veterans organizations are asking for a 300 per cent increase in this compensation, perhaps a little steep but nevertheless a

[Mr. Knowles (Norfolk-Haldimand).]

matter we should concern ourselves about. The fourth area concerning veterans groups all across the country is the need to establish a basic rate of pension related to the income of the unskilled labourer in government service. If that were done our pensioners would not find themselves in the economic trap they are in today.

In order that I do not talk only theory and complain of what the government is doing or failing to do, I should like to speak about conditions as they are at the grass roots of the problem. I refer to those men and women veterans, particularly the men, for whom the whole program was designed and whom it serves. I have been in touch with some of the welfare offices in the seven Legion branches in my riding and ascertained some of the matters that are of immediate concern to them. I trust that the minister is aware of them. First of all, the burnt-out pension should be increased. That view was expressed to me by the service officer in the Delhi area.

In the Hagersville area the matter bothering them the most was one we have already discussed, namely, the implementation of the Woods report. Another matter that welfare officers are constantly running into in trying to solve the problems of our veterans is that the wife of a veteran who is on pension can earn only \$1,250 without her husband's pension suffering as a result. In view of the rising cost of living, the increased cost of practically everything required to maintain a household, surely this figure is totally unrealistic. Even an adjustment of this sort would give some help to the people now suffering and awaiting the implementation of the Woods report.

Welfare officers of the Legion branches are also concerned about another matter. They feel that the reference to overseas service should be deleted from the conditions under which veterans may obtain relief. After all, it is not always the fault of the veteran that he was not sent overseas. He was under the command of the Department of National Defence or the Canadian forces and went where he was sent. He had no control over this. Surely this condition should be deleted from any consideration relating to assistance.

In the Waterford area the Legion officer underlined a point I have already made. He mentioned that a veteran who is partially disabled can earn only \$900 without reduction of his pension taking place. In light of the present-day increase in the cost of living this amount too is totally inadequate. These are