

Supply—Veterans Affairs

However, I must comment on the remark made a few minutes ago by the hon. member for Halifax (Mr. McCleave), who said that it might be one of the reasons why he might have reservations about bilingualism if the latter entailed such delays in the introduction of reports in both languages. I wonder what the hon. member for Halifax (Mr. McCleave) would have said if the French version only of the Woods report had been tabled in the house.

This is a very technical report. One should not forget that such reports comprise some quite technical terms and that it is important that both ethnic groups can have an exact understanding of the recommendations in precise terms and in a quite definite translation. I think that perhaps the Woods commission, which has undertaken this translation itself, should be urged to speed it up a little, but I am convinced that the minister will receive the report and that it will be made available to us without delay, so that the committee can get to work if this report is sent to it.

[*English*]

Mr. McCleave: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member who has just taken his seat directed some remarks at me and I do not expect he will quarrel with my rising. My response to his remarks is simple. I would not mind if the report were written in Latin, in Iroquois or in any other language. If there has been an injustice it is up to the government to correct that injustice. It should not hide behind the excuse that it has had to wait for months and months for a translation. If the report can only come before us in French and if the recommendations of the report are sound, the government should act on those recommendations. I would accept that wholeheartedly. I do not think we should take a good cause and trample on it or postpone action by hiding behind bilingualism.

Mr. Laniel: Would the hon. member permit a question? Does the hon. member know that the veterans association did not want that report to be referred to officials of the pension commission before it was referred to the committee on veterans affairs? The association did not want the commission to begin work on the report before the report had been made available to the committee because the veterans association wished to make representations to the committee in order to help in the preparation of a good committee report.

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Mr. McCleave: Mr. Chairman, I do not quarrel with the request of the veterans association nor do I argue with the hon. member. His remarks do not seem germane to the point we were arguing about.

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Chairman, I do not intend to hold up the minister's estimates. Like many other hon. members I feel that the increase in pensions is long overdue, and I welcome it.

I wish to bring one or two matters to the minister's attention. One is the interminable delay that some people experience in trying to have their appeals heard. I shall not go into great detail and I shall cite only one case as an example. It is the case of a veteran who was receiving a disability pension and who died approximately two years ago. Because it was alleged that his disability was only two-fifths attributable to war service his wife was not entitled to a war pension. Following his death strong evidence came to light contesting the allegation that his disability was two-fifths attributable to his war service and supporting strongly the widow's claim for a pension. I will not go into details about the case since it is being processed. I shall merely say that from my reading of the evidence there is a strong case for paying the widow a pension. She appealed the previous decision some months ago and despite numerous telephone calls and letters I understand that the appeal will not be heard until May or June.

● (5:30 p.m.)

The widow is faced with a real problem. She has a child attending a secondary school. He will finish school this year and she wants to send him to a university. Although she does not at present need financial assistance she is obliged to conserve the little money she has in order to hold on to her home. Her resources are not enough to permit her to further the education of her child without assistance and she is anxious to know where she stands so far as the child is concerned. In all fairness I do not understand why there should be such a delay in handling appeals after all the evidence has been turned in. In cases of this kind, widows are placed in an extremely unenviable position.

I have been involved in another similar case. The appeal was finally decided in the widow's favour after the case had been under consideration for almost five years. Such delays appear to be unnecessary and when they do occur the provision for 12 months