

Perhaps the greatest of all our assets was the experience gained through years of critical observation of the effectiveness or otherwise of the legislation and administrative measures which had been pursued with respect to the veterans of the war of 1914-18. We have drawn heavily upon that experience in planning the legislation which has been enacted during the past six years and in the measures which are being laid before this committee for consideration at the present session.

It may be of interest to the committee if I give a concise outline of the development of the present program by yearly stages, after which I shall discuss more fully the principal measures with which this committee will be asked to deal.

In presenting this progress summary I shall table a number of documents, acts of parliament, orders in council, reports and letters which it is hoped will be of assistance to honourable members of the committee in the subsequent discussions. Much of the legislation has already been assembled in a Reference Manual on Rehabilitation, a copy of which is available to every honourable member. I am tabling a copy with the secretary as Appendix I to my statement and shall from time to time give page references to its contents.

1939

One of the first steps taken on the outbreak of war was the adoption of an order in council making the Pension Act applicable to the newly mobilized personnel. (I table P.C. 2491, Sept. 2, 1939 as Appendix 2).

Due to the small establishment of permanent forces in Canada the navy, army and air force had very little hospital accommodation. Accordingly the Department of Pensions and National Health arranged with the Department of National Defence that its hospital facilities should be at the disposal of the Department of National Defence. The arrangement was ratified by P.C. 3004 of October 5, which I present as Appendix 3, and covered not only departmental hospitals but the contract privileges which the department enjoyed in a majority of the country's general hospitals.

On October 30, 1939, as Minister of Pensions and National Health, I addressed a letter to the Prime Minister recommending the appointment of a committee of the cabinet to begin the planning of rehabilitation measures for members of the armed forces when they should be discharged back to civil life. (I table the letter as Appendix 4.)

The need for an early commencement in such planning arose from the fact that some men were being discharged on physical grounds after very short periods of service, and it was only just and equitable that the re-establishment program should provide for their needs as well as for those who would not be discharged until after the war.

The Prime Minister replied on November 1 (Appendix 5) assenting to my proposal and the committee was set up by P.C. 4068½ of December 8, 1939. (Appendix 6).

As you will observe the committee consisted of the Minister of Pensions and National Health, convenor, and the Ministers of Public Works, National Defence, Agriculture, Labour and the Honourable J. A. MacKinnon, who was at that time a Minister without Portfolio.

The committee was directed to investigate the adequacy of existing governmental machinery and to make recommendations with regard to expansions, additions or re-adjustments. Authority was also given for the appointment of advisory committees to be selected from the personnel of government departments or agencies.

Two other measures adopted prior to the end of 1939 were:

P.C. 2584 of September 7, holding open for their return the positions of dominion government employees joining the armed forces; and