

many members of the House in the course of the previous session. The minister will speak at the end of this debate and will reply to the points raised by members on the other side of the House. I know that hon. members here anticipate his remarks with a good deal of interest.

The veterans affairs committee, at the end of our sittings in the spring, presented a report which was unanimously adopted in this House. It has been a source of some satisfaction to those of us who worked on the committee, Mr. Speaker, to know that there has been so much team work in what we were doing and that the committee was able to examine a great deal of evidence.

It is now 25 years since the initial veterans charter was adopted in 1945. The process of revising the work of the Pension Commission began in 1965 with the appointment of the Woods committee. That committee took some 3 years to do its work. It presented 1,300 pages of evidence and 148 separate and distinct recommendations concerning the work of the Canadian Pension Commission. Of those recommendations, the overwhelming majority was acceptable to the government and involved a restructuring of the Canadian Pension Commission and a simplification of its procedures. But the report of the committee went considerably beyond a mere restructuring and reorganization. It introduced a number of basic principles which called for a careful examination; it was not possible for the government at that time to accept them, just as it was not possible to accept the report of the Carter Commission on taxation.

The device which the government adopted in this case was the device of the white paper. In August, 1969, the minister who is now sitting in this House brought down a white paper on veterans affairs which was a very significant document. A number of hon. members participated in the matter of the Hong Kong veterans. I have discovered, and I have received correspondence subsequently from a number of veterans who were so involved, that some of our men were captured in Indonesia, Malaya and many other parts of the Far East, and they suffered as much privation as the Hong Kong veterans suffered. The white paper clearly recognizes our obligation and, without question, its recommendations were unanimously accepted.

The white paper also dealt with other matters, such as the benefit of the doubt provision. It talked about restructuring the Veterans Bureau and brought forward a number of recommendations acceptable to the government which were, without any question, acceptable also to everyone who understood what had happened in this field. But, in bringing down that white paper, the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Dubé) very carefully stated that this was a general outline and that the government would not take an inflexible position. The government was indicating those areas which were acceptable to it and it was asking, in the most democratic fashion possible, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, which was composed of members from every party represented in the House of Commons, to look at the Woods report and the white paper, to sort out matters and make recommendations to the government concerning those

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other matters on which it had not been possible to reach agreement.

I had the honour, Mr. Speaker, of being the chairman of that committee. That is something of which, during the course of my public career, I have been very proud. I regard the service in the past session of this Parliament as one of the greatest opportunities I have had.

• (3:10 p.m.)

The committee met 39 times. It heard from 14 organizations and a number of witnesses, including the minister and spokesmen of the department. The committee never lacked a quorum, Mr. Speaker. I say that by way of tribute to those members who served on the committee. This committee met when the House was not sitting in September of 1969. When a committee meeting was called, we never failed to establish a quorum.

I wish to pay the greatest tribute to the minister at this point. Without question, in his attitude, appearances before the committee and representations, he carefully avoided taking any dogmatic or firm position. He always said "This is what we think is right; this is what we are prepared to do." He put forward some proposals in which he believed, as well as those who were giving him advice. They firmly believed this was the best pattern of administration with regard to the appeal procedure.

Although the committee studied the entire range of 148 recommendations, the members spent a great deal of time in two major areas of special concern. I wish to speak today about these two areas. The first was a request of the veterans organizations to establish an independent body which would be above the pensions committee and which would pass judgment at the appeal stage.

In the course of my life I have had the honour of serving in the public service of Canada for nine years. During that time I learned a little about the principles of public administration. The principle of standing one independent body above another independent body was of great concern. Where such a structure has been established, it has not always been a good pattern of public administration. There is a basic rule which states that the laws of the land must be respected and accepted by the great majority of those to whom they apply. A law and a body of procedure that is not acceptable to the people who must live and work with it will not be a good law or a good procedure. This was the basic principle that guided the committee in its report regarding the appeal procedure. We felt we had to make this recommendation in light of the persistent and non-deviating suggestions with regard to an independent appeal board.

There was no way to judge the workload after the initial backlog was dealt with. There was no way to judge how many persons would be required for these different agencies after there was a stabilization of workload. For that reason, we recommended that appointments should be for a five year period. We suggested that the government study this after five years to see whether the procedure was the proper one.