

*Veterans Affairs Committee Report*

associated with some of the recommendations in the Woods report. Then it will probably list those recommendations in the Woods report which the government is prepared to accept.

This is not being fair to the committee system of the House of Commons. The whole idea of the beefed-up or rejuvenated program of activity for our committees is that private members of parliament shall have more say about what is going to be done. Are the committee members going to have an opportunity to deal with the recommendations of the Woods report directly, or are they simply going to be told the decisions the government has already made and only be given an opportunity to concur in those decisions?

The minister expressed the hope there will be ready consent to the passing of his motion to refer the Woods report to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. I have no objection to this. The motion will be on the order paper on Monday and it can pass without debate at that point so far as I am concerned. I suggest, nevertheless, that it is a case of breaking faith with veterans and veterans organizations to do it this way as opposed to the way it was promised to be done in September of last year.

As has already been pointed out, any item that is referred to committee next week can hardly be dealt with by the committee next week. Maybe we will be here longer than we anticipate. We may be here for the month of July, taking into consideration what has happened here today. I would love to stay on.

**An hon. Member:** We know that!

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** If some of the hon. members in the back row on the other side of the house do not want to stay, they can persuade the government to drop the proposed Standing Order 75C.

As the minister stated in his remarks earlier today, the best that can happen is for the report to be in the hands of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs in September, 1969. The promise was clear in September, 1968, that the report would be referred to the committee as quickly as possible. When the committee gets the report in September, 1969, instead of getting it with a free hand to listen to the veterans organizations and make the recommendations that the members of their own free will might have made, they will get it with a government document telling the government members on that committee, at any rate, how far the government will go. The chance of anything coming out of the

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

committee beyond what is in the white paper is very slim. In fact, it is just about nil. That is not playing fair with the veterans of this country.

The hon. member for Fort William (Mr. Badanai), the minister and the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis), if he gets into the debate before it is over, can tell us all the wonderful things that have been done and how good the programs are. What counts is what is being done now for the veterans, and we think this treatment is unfair to them.

● (3:10 p.m.)

Despite the fact that other members have referred to them I think I should say a word about the many things in the Woods report that need to be acted upon. My namesake, the hon. member for Norfolk-Haldimand (Mr. Knowles), pointed out that there are four things that have been singled out for top priority so far as veterans organizations are concerned. They are the question of an appeal board, dealing with cases of multiple disabilities, special treatment for the Hong Kong veterans, and the whole question of establishing a proper arrangement for a basic rate of pension.

But when one looks over the Woods report, its three volumes and its many pages, he finds it deals with a great many questions, many of them the concern of veterans across the years, such as the matter of pre-enlistment conditions, questions about blindness, the re-opening of claims, the benefit of the doubt clause, attendance allowances and so on. There are questions relating to widows, and many others of that sort.

Then on the fringe of all this there are questions relating to the War Veterans Allowance Act, to the situation faced by the Dieppe prisoners of war, merchant seamen, firefighters, and so on. There is a great host of problems of this kind, many of them dealt with in the Woods report, others not dealt with but related thereto, all of which make this a terribly important document, and we think it is most unfortunate that a whole year will have been lost because the government failed to keep its commitment made on Friday, September 13, 1968.

The minister says that the standing committee can meet in September after this motion is passed early next week. Well, if we are going to be here next week, and maybe the week after, and the week after that again, the committee does not need to put off its work until September. It might as well sit