

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

those organizations cause for very real concern. They feel that the delay is becoming far too lengthy. I would point out that the National Council of Veterans Associations in Canada had its brief ready under date of November 26, 1968. I also point out that the National Veterans Organizations of Canada, including the Royal Canadian Legion and other bodies, prepared a joint statement, copies of which were sent to all of us in this house on February 21, 1969, and also that the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada submitted their statement to us under date of March 21, 1969.

• (10:10 p.m.)

These various organizations for a long time have been ready and most anxious to appear before the committee. They have all recognized the great importance of the Woods report. They have emphasized that its many recommendations meet with their approval and that they would like to see them implemented. In fact, I think there are only one or two in respect of which there is any doubt at all. Special attention has been called to four important areas. Perhaps I might mention them. There is the question of the Hong Kong veterans and their dependants; the question of pensioners suffering from multiple disabilities; the need to establish an adequate basic pension and the need for the appointment of a pension appeal board.

As the time involved in getting this matter before the committee has dragged on some veterans' organizations have begun to wonder whether they should have accepted the idea of waiting for a white paper. Mr. G. K. Langford, Chairman of the National Council of Veterans Associations of Canada, wrote the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) on February 18, 1969, objecting to the fact that the veterans were having to wait for a government white paper. Indeed, that council feels that in so doing a limiting effect is being placed upon the committee itself. I shall not take the time to go into the pros and cons of that part of the contention, but it does seem to me to be most disappointing that this delay is being extended the way it is. One gets the awful feeling that month upon month can run to the end of the session and that there may not be any action taken. This would be a disgrace, but any lists I have seen of legislation to be dealt with at this session do not include the prospect of Woods report recommendations being acted on, for the obvious reason that the whole matter has not yet gone to the committee.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

I make an earnest plea to the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Dubé) to get this matter to the committee soon. Some of us are concerned and disappointed that the Woods report, with all the good that is in it, does not include matters dealing with the War Veterans Allowance Act. We have asked that such matters also be referred. We are afraid that since it takes this long to get something done about the Pension Act, it may take even longer to get something done about the War Veterans Allowance Act. If that is what happens, the veterans across the country will feel they have been forgotten. I know the minister can tell me that on March 17, as recorded at page 6726 of *Hansard*, he said clearly that the Woods report has not been forgotten. At that time he referred to the time spent on the preparation of the recommendations and the question of the cost. I have no doubt that is the reason for the delay, the old question of cost.

The fact of the matter, however, is that the veterans of this country have a claim on us, and they have the right to expect their case not to be delayed longer. I plead with the minister as urgently as I can to get the question of the Woods report, together with the War Veterans Allowance Act and other matters which concern veterans, before the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs as soon as possible. I hope he will yet find it possible to get that done before the month of April is over.

Hon. Jean-Eudes Dubé (Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, first of all I wish to express my appreciation of the interest of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) in veterans affairs in general and with the Woods committee report in particular. I know he is somewhat disappointed but I would ask him not to lose heart. His patience will be rewarded. As he said himself it took two and a half years to make the recommendations. Surely, if it took that long just to prepare the recommendations this is an indication of why it takes some time to bring these recommendations to fruition. My department has been quite busy reviewing the report. A committee formed of officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs and other departments has held over 70 meetings to study the Woods committee report, how much the implementation of the recommendations would cost and what recommendations would be in the best interests of the veterans.