

this will have been a very worthwhile day. Like other hon. members I am greatly concerned at the length of time it has taken to get action on these matters. The dates are well known to us all but perhaps I might repeat them. It is more than five years since the Woods committee was commissioned to do its job. True, it was a big job and it took the committee a long time to complete it. But when that committee was appointed, the hope was that something would soon be done to improve the position of veterans. Yet here we are, five years and a month later, and we still have not seen the legislation which was recommended as a result of that study.

The Woods committee was appointed in September, 1965. It made its report in March, 1968, about two and a half years later. It was a year and several months before we heard anything from the government of the day. Eventually, the white paper was produced; that was in August, 1969. I am happy to say that the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs began its deliberations in the following month, September, and its report was made to the House in June, 1970. As has been stated by previous speakers, shortly after this report was presented to the House, the House of Commons concurred in it. I recite these facts for two reasons: first, to indicate the length of time we have been dealing with these matters and, second, to show that with regard to all those things on which we have agreed there has been enthusiasm, unanimity and concern. I do not like this long delay. In fact, it seems to me that once this session started and the debate on the Speech from the Throne had been concluded, almost the first legislation brought into the House by the government should have been the bill implementing the promised improvements in our veterans legislation.

The motion proposed by the hon. member who began this debate deals in the main with two subjects. First, there is the whole question of the amendments to be made to the Pension Act arising out of the study by the Woods committee. Then there is the question which was not referred to the Woods committee, namely, the consideration of changes in the War Veterans Allowance Act. Accordingly, I should like to divide my remarks between those two general headings.

First, with respect to the proposed changes in the Pension Act, other members have already indicated that there are some changes upon which we agree. Let us have them as soon as we can. In particular, we have agreed on certain new procedures that are to be established, and we have agreed on the special appeal board to be set up over the Pension Commission. The hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis) was perfectly correct in his description of the way in which this matter was discussed in the committee and I think it is fair to say that the various veterans organizations, particularly the representatives of the National Council of Veterans Organizations who stayed with us right through the piece, deserve great credit for their assistance and for their perseverance. As hon. members know, what has been recommended in the matter of appeal procedures is a five year trial period and, like the hon. member for Ottawa West, I believe an arrangement of this kind will work only if it suits those concerned. I trust that the legislation will carry out this particular recommendation.

Veterans Allowance Increases

One of the features in the Woods Report, in the white paper and in our own report, which has been agreed on right down the line, concerns the treatment of Hong Kong veterans. The provision is a straightforward one, namely, that any Hong Kong veteran who has any disability at all should be treated as having a 48 per cent disability, or more, so that his pension will be a 50 per cent pension and so that his widow will automatically get a widow's pension in full. This has not been contested at any point and I still do not know why some effort was not made last session to bring in a bill to put this provision into effect. We have agreed on it all down the line and we made an offer in the committee on behalf of our respective parties that if such legislation were brought forward it would be agreed to without debate. I regret very much that no action was taken by the government in response to this offer.

We also agreed that there should be a settlement of the question of the quantum of the basic pension. A number of questions of that sort were agreed on in the committee, whether on a unanimous basis or after discussion, and I see no reason why these things should not be before us right at this time.

There are two or three matters about which we felt strongly in the committee, on which agreement was not reached. Even though no reference was made to them in the report, I hope, even at this stage, that consideration will be given to them. One has already been referred to, the provision for automatic aging. The veterans organizations felt very strongly about this, and so did many of the members of the committee. I hope that those who are going to draft the legislation might yet take a good look at that particular proposition.

• (3:30 p.m.)

I hope that all of the recommendations contained in the report will be included in the legislation. For example, I have in mind a provision about which we had a good deal of discussion in the committee, namely the treatment of widows of veterans where the pension of the veteran before he died was less than 48 per cent. As hon. members are aware, in such cases there is no automatic pension for the widow; her only recourse is to make an application under the War Veterans Allowance Act.

Despite the non-concurrence of the White Paper, our committee recommended that a provision be made in such cases for a pension as of right to be paid to the widow on a pro rata basis. I admit that in some cases that would not amount to much. In some cases the widow would still have to fall back on the War Veterans Allowance Act, particularly if her late husband's pension was down around the 10 to 20 per cent level; but it would mean a good deal to those whose pension was between, say, 35 and 45 per cent. This was recommended by the committee and particular attention was drawn to it in the preamble to the report. Therefore, I hope without question that that provision will be in the legislation when it is presented to the House which I hope will be in a few days.