

Adjournment Debate

We are, of course, talking about the report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs which that committee made to the House of June 12 of this year. That report arose out of our study on the Hermann Report having to do with prisoners of war in Northwest Europe, but our studies went a bit further. Indeed the recommendations the committee made were four. I spelled them out in some detail during a late show on Monday, October 27, as recorded in *Hansard* at pages 8598 and 8599, so I shall refrain from repeating all that detail tonight. I would just indicate what the four recommendations were.

First, we asked that there be a special piece of legislation dealing with prisoners of war. Second, we asked that the provisions regarding Canadian veterans who were prisoners of war at Hong Kong be improved, that instead of the pension being 50 per cent including any disability assessment it be 50 per cent for all who were at Hong Kong, with any disability assessment being added on top of that with a ceiling of 100 per cent. Our third recommendation was that there be a scale of benefits for veterans who were prisoners of war in Europe. Briefly the scale was that for incarceration of up to one and one-half years the pension would be 10 per cent. For incarceration of from one and one-half to two and one-half year it should be 15 per cent, and for incarceration of two and one-half years or over the pension should be 20 per cent. Our fourth recommendation had to do with widows of veterans. In particular we asked for a change in the well known 48 per cent rule. Our plea is that for widows of veterans in cases where the veterans' disability pension is less than 48 per cent there should be a pro rata widow's pension instead of none at all.

Now, the minister is as familiar with all this as I am, if not more so, and I say again that I know he is just as anxious as I am to get this legislation before the House. I am sure his parliamentary secretary now sitting behind him agrees with me, and I suspect that he too is hoping to hear a good answer tonight.

It is a puzzle to us how a matter like this can be around this long, and how the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) can tell me Thursday after Thursday after Thursday that the matter is still being considered by the government, and yet we cannot obtain an answer. I welcome very

strongly the words of the minister the last time he answered a question of mine during a late show when he expressed the hope that the restraint program which is now around us will not apply to prisoners of war or to widows of veterans. We back him 1,000 per cent on that.

So, Mr. Speaker, there it is. The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs gave a great deal of thought and attention to these matters. We were unanimous in our desire that these recommendations be implemented. I hope the minister can tell us tonight how soon he might be able to make an announcement and, if not, that he will tell us what we can do to help him.

Hon. Daniel J. MacDonald (Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to be able to reply to the question of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) concerning the decision to implement the recommendations of the standing committee regarding prisoners of war and widow's pensions.

Hon. members will recall that my parliamentary secretary spoke concerning the same matter on October 30, 1975, as reported at page 8735 of *Hansard*. At that time he reminded hon. members that the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs at its meeting of June 22, 1972, requested that a study be undertaken to identify any physiological or psychological long-term effects which their incarceration may have had on ex-prisoners of war of the European theatre, numbering approximately 7,500. The government accepted this recommendation and on January 31, 1973, the study was undertaken by Dr. J. Douglas Hermann, a distinguished Canadian surgeon. Dr. Hermann's report was tabled in the House of Commons on Monday, November 18, 1974. It was subsequently referred to the standing committee for study on Wednesday, March 26, 1975, and the committee reported back to the House on Thursday, June 12, 1975.

In the meantime I have held consultations on this very important subject with my colleagues. As I confirmed last Thursday, this matter is still under active consideration by the government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until 2 p.m. tomorrow.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.19 p.m.