

Adjournment Debate

A copy of the relevant Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence (*Issue No. 2*) is tabled.

The whole case is right there in that report, Madam Speaker. We welcome the fact that there is a 50 per cent floor, but we feel that for those Hong Kong survivors who are out of the labour market, whether because they cannot find employment or because their health does not make it possible for them to work, this suggestion is one this House would like to see implemented. We are really talking about only 460 survivors of that Hong Kong expedition.

I know that no one in this House is more sympathetic toward those survivors or feels more deeply about them than the honourable and gallant Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald). If he is having trouble with his Cabinet colleagues some of us are ready to back him up. We do hope he will soon be able to bring in the legislation that the standing committee recommended. I would remind him that he was there when that recommendation was made and he seemed to be in complete sympathy with it. I hope he has good news tonight.

Hon. Daniel J. MacDonald (Minister of Veterans Affairs): As indicated by my colleague opposite, there was legislation passed to assist the Hong Kong veterans and other Canadians who were prisoners of the Japanese. Anyone who was a prisoner received 50 per cent pension. This was very beneficial at the time of passage and continues to be so. The widows of Hong Kong veterans continue to receive the pension.

If I recall the motion by the committee on veterans affairs, and I have not got it before me, it was that all those who were prisoners of the Japanese during the war and not employable or not able to obtain employment should have their pensions increased to 100 per cent.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): That is correct.

Mr. MacDonald (Cardigan): I would submit, as I have done previously, a day or two ago, that this whole matter requires a considerable amount of work and detail. The pension commission of my department, in conjunction with others, is presently studying this matter and I hope to be able to come forward with a report on it before too long.

MULTICULTURALISM—ALLEGED CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT POLICY—REQUEST FOR ASSURANCE TO MINORITY GROUPS

Mr. Paul Yewchuk (Athabasca): Madam Speaker, I want to make a few comments about the subject of multiculturalism. I think it is fair to say that since at least the turn of the century minority groups in this country have contributed greatly to the progress and development of the country. It is also fair to say that there has been a great deal of progress made in terms of these minority groups being accepted socially, economically and otherwise by Canada's majority groups.

● (2210)

When the multiculturalism policy was announced a couple of years ago it appeared at the time that the government of the day was taking cognizance of the fact

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

that Canada's minority groups had a real and genuine desire to maintain their own particular individual identities, the reason being that any individual or individual group if they were to compete successfully in society and make the maximum contribution to that society must feel confident and proud of their own identity.

We can look back even to debates in this chamber at the turn of the century and find examples where blatant outright prejudice was expressed against minority groups coming into the country at that time. As I said before, I think the situation within this country certainly has improved as these groups have been more identified as part of the Canadian entity, and as they have proven themselves to be as productive, as useful, as intelligent and so on as anyone else in Canadian society.

The policy of the past two years stirred a genuine hope and feeling among Canada's minority groups that finally their status had been elevated from third class to second class citizens, and that it will be elevated in due course even to that of first class citizens.

It is interesting to note that following the 1972 election, when the Liberals came back with a narrow margin and were groping for support in the hope that they might get back with a majority, they were very interested in multiculturalism and appointed a full-time minister, although he was not given any authority. He was sort of like the fellow who operates the gas pump at the gas station while the real manager is inside, in this case the Secretary of State.

At that time we had a full-time minister who was dedicated to the concept of multiculturalism and thought it was a good thing for the country. He probably tried to do a sincere job. He thought he could promote the concept and make it more acceptable to society at large. I think it is fair to say that, having appointed this man, the government of the day did improve its position with regard to its relationship in political terms with minority groups, in that some of these people decided to support the government in the 1974 election for that reason.

It is difficult for me to understand why, when a majority government was returned, suddenly these people were no longer important. It seemed that suddenly they were not needed any more because a majority government was returned. We were back in the old arrogant days of the twenty-eight parliament.

I asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) a question in the House, and he said he did not think the situation was upsetting anybody or that it meant a downgrading. The Prime Minister suggested that the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) is so intelligent and competent that in 5 per cent of his time he could do more for multiculturalism than the hon. member for Parkdale was able to do on a full-time basis. I find that argument difficult to buy.

I have received responses to a question I asked of ten major ethnic groups in the country. I asked what they thought about the appointment of a part-time rather than full-time minister, and whether they thought this would increase the status of multiculturalism. One group said that it was confusing, that they felt labour was far removed from multiculturalism and they wondered what would happen. Another group was disappointed and did