

Veterans Affairs is putting up a tremendous case. I suspect he is also strongly supported by the Minister of National Revenue who, after all, moved this very motion when he was in the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. I hope there are other ministers in the cabinet who are supporting the Minister of Veterans Affairs as well.

An hon. Member: He asked for this in the committee.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): It is obvious that there must be a majority on the wrong side, or we would have had it by now. When we got the report last June, I pressed on the minister the possibility of bringing in a bill before we rose for the summer. He was sympathetic but did not think we could get one before we adjourned in July. Then when we came back in the fall—well, the record is there. Every Thursday I have asked for this, and my hon. friend for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall) and the hon. member for Norfolk-Haldimand have been up on Standing Order 43 motions and with questions. I suspect that though the Liberal members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs have not been on their feet in the House asking for this, they have been putting all kinds of pressure on the government to take action on this matter. To go on week after week and simply be told, as the government House leader said today, that no decision had been taken just is not good enough for the veterans and it is not good enough for the parliamentary system.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs has also answered my questions on this matter on two or three occasions and it has been dealt with in a couple of late shows. I am grateful that he stayed for those late shows to give us a sympathetic answer. For example, on October 27, 1975, as reported at page 8599 of *Hansard*, when the minister responded to one of my questions he told the story of how the Hermann report had been commissioned, how the committee had made its recommendations, and so on. Then he said:

● (1540)

In the meantime I have held consultations on this very important subject with my colleagues. At the present time this, along with other government proposals, must be examined carefully in the light of the recently announced guidelines. I would hope, as would other members of the House, that the request for compensation for ex-prisoners of war will not become a victim of our financial restrictions.

If there were any way I could underline those words, I would do so thousands of times over. This is exactly the way we feel about it. The minister went on to conclude that short statement by saying:

I hope to have something more definite to announce before too long.

That was on October 27, and here it is, December 11, and we are still not able to get an announcement. I suppose the problem that faces us was contained in that sentence I read in which the minister said that this proposal, along with others, has to be examined carefully in light of the recently announced guidelines. I was glad to hear him say, expressing his view, that he hoped the situation of these former prisoners of war would not become a victim of our financial restrictions, and I want to underline that as strongly as I can. Whatever we may think about Bill C-73, about the

Veterans Affairs

anti-inflation white paper and the government's anti-inflation program, surely there is no case for a doctrinaire position that says: "No, no, no. This is a new program; therefore, we have to say no".

There are references in the white paper to the rights of those who have been treated unfairly to have a catch-up provision, and so on. Even in times of restraint, and even when you may have to cut moneys from some people, surely you have to look at everything in terms of fairness. I submit it is not fair to our veterans who were prisoners of war to say to them, "The committee may have recommended this last June, it may have recommended it in October a year ago, and it may have been recommending it for weeks and months, but in the meantime the Prime Minister made his Thanksgiving day speech so they have to be cut off". I plead that this not happen. Even if there are cuts taking place in other areas of expenditure, surely this is not the place for that. I repeat, with the full endorsement, I am sure, of the whole House, those words of the minister when he said:

I would hope, as would other members of the House, that the request for compensation for ex-prisoners of war will not become a victim of our financial restrictions.

Why have I presented this motion which has been on the order paper for several days, and why am I proceeding with it today? Surely the answer must be obvious. It is difficult to do this, especially when we are approaching Christmas and there is a lot of talk around of when we are going to get out, and so on, for taking a day for this cuts into any such program. But surely when the minister says, week after week, that the matter is still under consideration, and nothing is forthcoming, parliament has to express itself. I hope that is what is happening today. I hope this day's debate, during which I trust there will be participants from all corners of the House, will be a debate that says to the government, "We think this legislation is justified and we want it now". I hope this will be a day when this House says to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, "The next time you go into a meeting of the cabinet you have the wholehearted endorsement of all the members of the House of Commons".

That is our purpose today, and that is one of the reasons I have emphasized the fact that we operate, in the veterans affairs committee, on a basis of such good will and unanimity. It is one of the reasons I hope there will be no potshots or cracks back and forth, or anything of a partisan sort taking place in the debate in this House. We are as one, all of us who are members of the veterans affairs committee, and I am sure we are supported by practically all members of the House in what we are trying to do. We are trying to get the government to see that parliament wants its will respected, that parliament wants what it has suggested should be done for the veterans, and we are not satisfied to listen to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) say week after week that the legislation is not yet ready.

In presenting the motion today, let me add that there is a special request I should like to put to Your Honour. We are operating under a rule and a ruling by Mr. Speaker Lamoureaux that permits this debate to take place because a member has put down the motion, as I have done. It is understood that if tonight a vote has not been taken and