

*Veterans Affairs*

awarded compensation in accordance with the following schedule:

Incarcerated 0-1½ years—10 per cent

Incarcerated 1½-2½ years—15 per cent

Incarcerated 2½ years or over—20 per cent

To this compensation would be added the amount of pension payable under the Pension Act on account of an assessed pensionable disability to a maximum total of 100 per cent. Escapees and evaders should also be considered under this paragraph.

Your committee also recommends to the House that consideration be given to amending the Pension Act to provide that a widow's pension be awarded on a sliding scale as follows:

When at the time of death of the prisoner he was, or would have been in receipt of a pension assessed at 47 per cent or less, that pension be paid to the widow in double proportion to the assessed degree of the prisoner's disability as it relates to the basic pension granted to widows.

At the present time a full widow's pension is paid when the pensioner's death was attributable to or was incurred during wartime military service, or in the case of peacetime forces if it arose out of or was directly connected with service; or when the pensioner's disability was assessed at 48 per cent or more at the time of death. The effect of this would be that because 100 per cent widow's pension is payable when the disability pensioner was paid pension at the 50 per cent rate, a double proportion would be payable if his disability was assessed at a lesser rate, so that, for example, the widow of a 40 per cent pensioner would be awarded 80 per cent of the normal widow's pension.

● (1530)

That is the end of the text of the report that we presented on June 12, and I suggest it is a very good report. I believe its resolution of what we should do about the Hong Kong prisoners is a very wise and acceptable one.

But the time is long overdue for this parliament to do something about those who were prisoners of war in Europe. If hon. members were listening to my reading of the text of the report, they would have noticed that we are concerned not only for those who were prisoners of war and were actually incarcerated but also for those who were shot down over Europe and wandered about from place to place, like one of the distinguished members of this House. They were known as evaders or escapees.

I believe the committee has come up with an excellent proposal in both cases. It comes about because of the Hermann report which was commissioned by the government following a request by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs in June of 1972, 3½ years ago. In addition to the Hermann report, which took a long time coming but which was of great benefit to us, we had a number of organizations appear before us. As I have said, we did a great deal of what I think was responsible thinking about this problem and we came up with this very excellent report regarding prisoners of war.

I also think that what the report proposes in regard to widows is responsible and long overdue. As I have indicated, the Woods report dealt with this issue. We were in favour of carrying out the Woods report recommendations when the committee met on the Woods report a few years ago, but the government turned us down. I still think it is most unfair that although in a case where a veteran is on a 50 per cent pension or more his widow will get the full widow's pension, in the case of a veteran drawing a pension of, say, 45 per cent, his widow will get nothing at all. Surely the least we should do is to prorate that pension.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

That is what the Woods report recommended and it is what is now recommended in our report to the House.

I would be happy, as I am sure my colleagues on the veterans affairs committee would, to talk about the whole broad range of veterans affairs and the other improvements that still need to be made respecting the War Veterans Allowance Act, and so on. But procedurally we must stay with what is before us, and what is before us is the June 12 report of the committee and I urge very strongly that it be implemented without further delay.

As is always the case, I am reluctant to talk about what delay does to certain people, but it has to be said, Mr. Speaker, that every month that goes by means that more and more Hong Kong veterans die off and that still more are not able to stay in the labour market. Statistics are not quite this severe in regard to the prisoners of war in Europe. We have one of them sitting not far from me, a distinguished member of this House, who seems to be doing very well, but there are many others who find it difficult to keep up with the rat race of modern industrial activity. The traumatic experience that they went through of being incarcerated is something that stays with them all their lives.

It is not proposed that we put them on some magnanimous pension. All we are proposing is that the pensions in the schedule that I read out a moment ago be adopted, namely, 10 per cent for incarceration up to a year and a half, 15 per cent for incarceration for 1½ to 2½ years, and 20 per cent for incarceration for over 2½ years. Sometimes when we talk about pensions and percentages a press man will stop us outside and ask, "Ten percent or 20 per cent of what?" Most of us who are involved in this question know what we are talking about, but perhaps it should be made clear that there is what is known as a 100 per cent disability pension for a war disability when a veteran is 100 per cent unable to earn a living. The amount of that pension is roughly equivalent to the average income of persons in the public service in the five or six lower categories, though it has not been kept at that level as we had hoped. So when a person gets a 10 per cent pension because of a 10 per cent disability, he gets 10 per cent of the total figure.

We are not asking for the moon for these veterans who spent time in prisoner of war camps in Europe during World War II. However, I think all members of the committee felt that the case made by those who came before us was a very strong one. In particular, we had representations from the Dieppe Prisoners of War Association and various organizations representing those who were prisoners of war. Time is going by. We are not talking about something that happened yesterday, but away back in the forties. Many who should have had the benefit of this legislation have now passed on, but there are many others with us who deserve what the report asks for and I urge very strongly that the government accept this proposal.

In the final analysis, that is what has to happen. In our system we do not make these decisions regarding things costing money; the government has to. All we can do, as a committee and as a parliament, is plead. But surely there comes a time when pleading which is consistent, unanimous and responsible ought to have some effect on the cabinet. I have no doubt that this battle has been fought vigorously inside cabinet and I am sure the Minister of