

*Adjournment Debate***PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT
MOTION***[English]*

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

VETERANS AFFAIRS—SUGGESTED PRORATA PENSIONS FOR
WIDOWS OF VETERANS WHOSE PENSIONS WERE LESS THAN
FORTY-EIGHT PER CENT

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, one of the things I have learned during the years I have been in this House is that if one has a good cause and stays with it long enough he will win. The sad part of it is that sometimes it takes a lot longer than it should but in the end persistence pays. So it is that the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) and I are here tonight to discuss a good cause and I dare to hope that he and I agree that it is a cause that must be won.

● (2200)

My appearance on this late show arises out of a question which I put to the minister on Thursday, November 4, as reported in *Hansard* at page 756. My question was in the following terms:

Since Remembrance Day is only a week away, will the minister consider, in honour of that day, the introduction of legislation to provide prorata pensions for widows of veterans where the veteran's pension was less than 48 per cent?

The answer was as follows:

HON. DANIEL J. MACDONALD (MINISTER OF VETERANS AFFAIRS): Mr. Speaker, it is under consideration by the government, as is other legislation.

I had a supplementary question which pressed the point that something might be announced before Remembrance Day. I regret to say that that did not happen, but I hope that the delay with regard to this matter will not last much longer.

As most hon. members know, certainly all of us who are interested in veterans affairs, there is a provision in the Pension Act for a widow's pension for widows of veterans who were in receipt of or were entitled to receive disability pensions. However, the very strict provision in that act is that if the veteran's pension was less than 48 per cent, there is no pension as a matter of right for the widow. Let me repeat it. If the veteran's pension is 48 per cent or more, the widow gets the full widow's pension provided under the Pension Act, but if the veteran's pension was less than 48 per cent, she gets nothing under that legislation.

For many years it has been felt that this is unfair, and it has been recommended a good many times that this unfairness be corrected. One of the most thorough examinations of this question was made by Mr. Justice Mervyn Woods, and in the Woods report there was the clear recommendation that the 48 per cent rule be changed. In a more recent report, namely that by Dr. J. Douglas Hermann on prisoners of war in Europe, there was an ancillary recommendation that this 48 per cent rule be altered and that prorata pensions be provided for

[Mr. McRae.]

widows where the veteran's pension was less than 48 per cent. To my knowledge, at least three or four times the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs has recommended in favour of the very thing that was proposed by Mr. Justice Woods and by Dr. Hermann. Each time that the committee have voted on this issue, we have in fact taken our stand for prorata pensions for widows of veterans in the case where the veteran's pension was less than 48 per cent.

The rule that is there now comes from a day when, generally speaking, pensions for widows were a lot less generous than they are today. They are still not generous enough, but this rule comes out of a bygone day. In these days we realize that if equality between men and women is to mean anything, we have to do better for our widows. I suggest that the best place to start to achieve full equality and a proper deal for widows is by action of the government itself under the Department of Veterans Affairs. I firmly believe that we will win this some day. I believe that the minister in his heart wants it just as much as I do, but he has trouble with those cabinet colleagues of his who are forever holding him back and telling him he has to practise restraint. There is no fairness in this provision which denies widows any pension at all if the veteran's pension was 48 per cent or less, and it must be changed.

Let the minister not tell me about the War Veterans Allowance Act. I know all about that and I know the other provisions that are available, but it means something to a veteran's widow, as it does to a veteran, to have a pension as a matter of right under the Pension Act, and I want to see it extended to cover all widows, including those where the veteran's pension was below the 48 per cent level. That would seem to make sense, at least as a start, and I hope the minister will be able tonight to indicate that he does agree with what Mr. Justice Woods, Dr. Hermann and our committee have recommended, and that just as soon as he can get his fellow cabinet ministers to see the light he will bring in the necessary amendment to the Pension Act to provide adequate pensions for the widows of Canadian war veterans.

Hon. Daniel J. MacDonald (Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to reply to the question of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) regarding the suggested provision of prorata pensions for widows of veterans where the veterans' pensions were less than 48 per cent.

The government is aware of all the recommendations which have been made to provide prorata pensions for widows of disability pensioners. At the present time a widow would be pensioned if her husband's death was attributable to service or was incurred during wartime. In addition, if her husband's pensionable disabilities were assessed at 48 per cent or more during his lifetime, she would be eligible for a widow's pension.

This percentage was selected because at that rate the veterans were obviously seriously disabled, and it was considered that the pensionable condition might play a part, however small, in the pensioner's death. On the other hand, if someone is pensioned at 5 per cent for flat feet and dies from a different cause, his death bears no relationship to his pensioned condi-