

*Veterans Affairs*

of this House. All of them joined in making this a unanimous report.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) is not a member of the committee but he was present and took part in the discussion. I think I am being fair to him when I say he was happy with the outcome of our discussions. We did not recommend everything the organizations which appeared before us requested. We did some scaling down, some compromising, but we produced a unanimous report which had the support of the 20 members of the committee and which certainly appeared to have the support that day of the Minister of Veterans Affairs himself. I should like to pay a tribute, in passing, to the hon. member for Mercier who does an excellent job chairing that committee. Although his capacity for being impartial is such that he did not take part in the debate, there is no doubt that he, too, was pleased with the outcome of those proceedings. Indeed, I remember that on June 12, when he presented the report in the House, he did so with a great deal of pleasure and pride.

● (1520)

So we have before us proposals which received widespread, indeed unanimous, support. But we also have to consider the issue of the importance of parliament. What is the point of talking about the work of members of parliament, backbenchers, and so on? What is the point of talking about the committee system and matters being referred to a committee for detailed study if, after all this is done and a thoroughly researched report is tabled, the government takes no action?

I would point out that the report we tabled on June 12, 1975, was not the first time in this very session that we had made a recommendation with respect to one of the aspects of this matter. On October 22, 1974, early in the course of this session, as will be found by reference to page 77 of *Votes and Proceedings* for that day, we tabled a report having to do with Canadian veterans who were prisoners of war in Hong Kong; we had not yet dealt with those who were prisoners of war in Europe because the J. D. Hermann commission was studying the matter. However, as a result of representations made to us by the Hong Kong Veterans Association we made a report which reads as follows:

Your committee recommends that the government consider the advisability of introducing legislation to provide for full pensions to all Hong Kong veterans forced out of the labour market.

If I recall correctly, the hon. member for St. Boniface moved that recommendation in committee, even as it was the present Minister of National Revenue who moved the report which was presented on June 12. I am making the point, Mr. Speaker, that twice in six months the veterans affairs committee has reported on the question of prisoners of war.

While I am referring to the number of times our committee had dealt with these matters, may I jump ahead to that part of our June 12 report which deals with the position of widows, especially those whose husbands had been receiving pensions of less than 48 per cent. The recommendation concerning them is in the report of June 12, concurrence in which we are now seeking. May I say that the recommendation that something be done to improve the position of

widows of veterans who were receiving less than 48 per cent was contained in the Woods report, one of the finest documents ever produced in relation to veterans' legislation.

At least twice—it might have been three times, but certainly it was at least twice—during our consideration of the Woods report, the government's white paper based on that report and the legislation brought forward subsequently, there were majority votes in the standing committee calling for the acceptance of the Woods committee recommendation that there be a pro rata pension for such widows. I submit, therefore, that what we are talking about today is not something which has been produced from the top of our heads, but something which has been considered and studied for a long time, and that the various elements of this report are elements which have received the endorsement of members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs over a long period of time.

I am not only pleading, as I know others will, the cause of veterans; I am pleading for parliament to be listened to by the government. When you get all these committees making recommendations and presenting them thoughtfully to the government, and when you find the government saying no, not just to us on the opposition side but to an entire committee such as the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, the majority of whose members are supporters of the government, I suggest it is very hard for us to feel there is any great merit in the committee system and that it is pretty hard to believe we have a parliamentary system which is operating as it should. I seem to us, rather, that we have a government which runs the entire show in its own way.

It is time now to put on the record what we recommended in our report of June 12, tabled by the hon. member for Mercier. It can be found in *Votes and Proceedings* of that day at pages 627 and 628. After reciting the kind of work we had done, making use of the Hermann report, and so on, we set out our recommendations as follows:

Your committee recommends: That the House give consideration to the following:

- 1) That a new act of parliament be enacted to provide compensation to all former prisoners of war.

The effect of this would be to retain the principle in the Pension Act that payment of wartime disability pension be restricted to those instances where the injury or disease or aggravation thereof was attributable to or incurred during military service, and that special compensation for the maltreatment, indignities and residual disabilities resulting from prisoner of war incarceration which cannot be recognized or identified would be payable under a separate act.

- 2) That the formula for compensation payable to former prisoners of war of the Japanese be changed to provide that each such former prisoner of war will receive compensation equivalent to 50 per cent pension to which will be added the amount of pension payable under the Pension Act on account of his assessed disability to a maximum total of 100 per cent.

The effect of this would be to ensure that those who are the most seriously disabled will receive the greatest benefit. At the present time the least seriously disabled of the former prisoners of war of the Japanese derive the greatest benefit from the special provisions made for these former prisoners of war.

- 3) That prisoners of war of other powers of World War II or who were captured by hostile forces subsequent to World War II be