

Veterans Affairs

● (1510)

Mr. Cossitt: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order with regard to question No. 69, which is the first question on the order paper. It has been outstanding since a year ago last September 30. When a question becomes so outstanding that it appears all by itself as the only question remaining from 1974, its loneliness on the order paper ought to be settled by a government answer. The question is very simple. It asks, basically, how many trips the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has made outside Ottawa at public expense for the purpose of holidaying, attending Liberal party functions and that sort of thing. Why does the government not see fit, after a year and three months, to bring in an answer which should be simple?

I would also refer to question No. 1,521, the second question remaining on the order paper, which concerns one specific trip made by the Prime Minister to the city of Montreal. The trip was made last January. I would have thought that by now they would have been able to figure out the answer. I realize the Prime Minister makes hundreds of trips at public expense, but surely with the hundred flunkies in his office, and the high salaries they are receiving, it is about time they were put to work and told to figure out these answers.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS**CONCURRENCE IN SEVENTH REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE**

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre) moved that the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, presented to the House on Thursday, June 12, 1975, be concurred in.

He said: Mr. Speaker, as Your Honour is aware, the seconder of this motion is my friend, the hon. member for Norfolk-Haldimand (Mr. Knowles). I might add that if our rules permitted more than one member to be listed as a seconder, there would be a fairly lengthy list. I mention in particular the hon. member for Rimouski (Mr. Allard) who would like to have been listed as seconder. I deliberately did not ask any of my friends on the Liberal side of the House because I did not want to embarrass them. However, I am satisfied that there are a number over there who would like to be associated with this motion.

The motion, as the House is aware, calls for concurrence in the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs which was presented to the House by the hon. member for Mercier (Mr. Boulanger) on Thursday, June 12 of this year.

May I say at the outset that during my years in this place I have had the privilege of serving on a good many committees. Frankly, I know of no committee that I have enjoyed serving on more than the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. It is true there are times when we have our differences. There have been times when we have had to decide issues by recorded votes. In the main, however, it

[Mr. Baker (Gander-Twillingate).]

is a committee all the members of which are concerned for the welfare of our veterans, and most of the decisions reached in the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs are unanimous decisions. I am sure that I speak for all who are on that committee in this session, and for all who have served on the committee, when I say it is a privilege to participate in the work of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

The result of this pleasure that we have in being members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs is that we are reluctant to bring its reports to the kind of debate that could lead to a vote on the floor of the House of Commons. We prefer that the validity of the reports that we make persuade the government to meet the requests and the proposals of the committee. However, in this case it will be six months tomorrow since this committee's report was tabled, and as yet no action has been taken on it.

As hon. members are aware, I have asked the government House leader literally every Thursday this fall when we might expect legislation to implement this report. We continue to get the answer that the matter is under consideration but that no decision has been taken. I am sure that members in all parts of this House, particularly those who are members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, are deeply disappointed by the delay in dealing with the matter which is set out in the seventh report of our committee.

In general terms, it deals with the question of doing some thing special for Canadian veterans who were prisoners of war. On one hand, it deals with those who were prisoners of war of the Japanese, mostly at Hong Kong, and calls for an improvement in the pension arrangements for those veterans; on the other hand, it calls for something new, namely, the instituting of a limited pension for those who were prisoners of war in Europe. In addition to the proposals that the report makes about prisoners of war, it makes a very important and long-awaited proposal regarding widows of veterans who were on disability pensions. I shall get into the details of that in a moment. In fact, I think I should read the report into the record so that it will be part of today's proceedings.

I wish to make it clear that we are not discussing the whole range of veterans affairs. Rather, we are discussing something very specific, namely, pensions for Canadian veterans who were prisoners of war under two headings, Hong Kong and Europe. We are also discussing the question of what is being done for widows of veterans where the veterans were on disability pension.

I want to emphasize the fact that the report that we tabled on June 12 of this year was a completely unanimous report on the part of the committee. Those present when the report was adopted included some very important personages on the other side of the House. On this side of the House, of course, we are all important. However, we had extremely important persons, namely, the chief government whip, the hon. member for St. Boniface (Mr. Guay), and the present Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Cullen) who was then a private member. He actually made the motion for the adoption of this report. We also had with us the hon. member for London East (Mr. Turner) who has since been promoted and is now Assistant Deputy Speaker