

*Veterans Affairs*

the main, since we are led to believe that the pension proposals for Canadian veterans who were former prisoners of war will be more or less those that were set out in the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, we welcome the proposed legislation and we shall give it our full support.

Like the hon. member for Norfolk-Haldimand (Mr. Knowles), I regret that there are certain things that were in the report which have not been mentioned today by the minister. One of those is any reference to escapees and evaders. In our report we expressed the hope that this legislation would cover them as well. I believe we have at least one member in this House who would be covered by that provision. I am sorry that is not included in the minister's statement.

● (1520)

I also express my very deep regret that there is no reference in the statement to anything being done for widows of veterans generally, having in mind widows of all veterans who are on disability pensions. On at least three occasions in recent years the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs has recommended that the Pension Act be amended so that widows of veterans where the veteran's pension was 48 per cent or less be given a pro rata pension as of right. This was also strongly recommended some years ago in the Woods report. I would hope that some time this will be implemented. As it is not mentioned in the minister's statement, I suppose we will not see it in the bill, but I join with my colleague who spoke before me when he said that down the road we shall keep the pressure on for this improvement in respect of the widows of veterans who were on disability pensions.

In the meantime, we are glad that this long, long wait is over. I refer particularly to the time that has elapsed since the committee made its report on June 12, 1975. If the minister can just get this bill on the order paper in a very few days, we will have it passed in almost no time at all.

[Translation]

**Mr. Eudore Allard (Rimouski):** Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to join the previous speakers to extend my sincere thanks to the minister who quickly sent us a copy of the statement on the government's reaction to the report from a study on prisoners of war.

Moreover, I am very glad to see that the government at last decided to implement the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs with the firm intention of putting forward a bill giving deserved compensation to prisoners of war. There is no doubt, Mr. Speaker, that the prisoners of war suffered greatly by their captivity and that, in my humble opinion, we have a responsibility towards these prisoners, as most of them grew old very quickly, or are handicapped because of malnutrition or of the cruelties they endured.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that the government will consider the distress of the widows, of the orphans and of the families of these prisoners because, in a way, they also had their share of distress and misgivings.

Once again, I agree with the minister's statement considering that the bill which he intends to introduce shortly will result in reducing the hardships of those prisoners. I

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

hope the government will keep worrying about those prisoners who left a part of themselves in enemy prisons. Somebody said a moment ago that everything comes to him who waits. I would add that it is never too late to be right. So once again I thank the minister and I hope that this bill, as the member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) said so well, will not raise too many objections and will be passed as soon as possible.

[English]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. Under the Standing Order there is discretion to allow questions, or to limit them as the Chair sees fit. The statement made today by the minister proposes the introduction of legislation which has been anticipated, and obviously questioning should be carried out when the legislation is presented. Also, there does not seem to be much disagreement; therefore, I intend severely to limit the questioning.

Since I realize two or three members have waited here with the intention of asking questions, I think the purpose would be served if each member were allowed to put one question. I will recognize the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert), the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall), the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), and the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. MacFarlane).

**Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West):** As you know, Mr. Speaker, it would have been rather difficult to keep me down today since I am the only person in this chamber directly interested in that I might, shall I say, benefit from this announcement. Beyond that, however, may I say, in welcoming this statement and finding myself among many relatively latter-day advocates of prisoner of war compensation, that I am wondering whether the minister, in his accolades in this regard, would not remember the Dieppe veterans and their prisoner of war association which was among the first to go after this legislation.

May I ask the minister whether, in establishing the gradations of entitlement, adequate regard has been paid to those men who were prisoners of war for up to four and five years in Europe, the early RAF and RCAF prisoners of war who spent, as I have said, four or five years in prison camps and who suffered the early rigours of prisoners of war in 1939 and 1940. If the minister wants any description of them, I am quite prepared to fill his ear for a couple of hours, because their treatment in many ways in the end was comparable to that of the Japanese starting in December, 1941.

So I ask the minister if special attention is being paid to those former prisoners of war, and also what attention is being paid to the first three months of one's prisoner of war treatment, because I have heard that those who do not have a three-month period may not qualify under the legislation. The toughest time, psychologically and physically, is in the first three months.