

Aggrieved PoWs can appeal to Governor

Aggrieved applicants under the Volunteer and Naval Volunteer Pensions Ordinance can now appeal to the Governor, said the Chief Secretary, Sir Philip Haddon-Cave, yesterday.

He said the Governor will, where appropriate, seek advice from the Executive Council before deciding on an appeal.

This is intended to remedy the situation whereby there is no formal appeal procedure existing under the ordinance.

And Sir Philip officially announced that the recent discussion on the subject is closed — after a thorough review of existing benefits to former prisoners of war ordered by the Governor.

Sir Philip said he hoped the review, and the attention which had been given by the Executive Council, will satisfy those concerned that all that can reasonably be done for the PoWs is actually being done.

He also hoped that the somewhat distressing controversy that has surrounded the subject recently would now be closed.

Sir Philip said the review was conducted by a senior officer without previous involvement in the matter.

He said the officer concluded that pensions payable to those who were PoWs in Hongkong during World War II or their dependents in respect of disability or death had been paid at the same rates and on the same conditions as applicable to members of the United Kingdom's regular forces.

The official also found medical treatment available to PoWs living in Hongkong compared favourably with that in Britain.

He also found grants paid by the War Memorial and Far Eastern Relief Funds to beneficiaries are much higher than those available through the local public assistance scheme, and are fair and reasonable in relation to average household incomes in Hongkong.

Another finding is that medical considerations contained in the Richardson Report on former Canadian PoWs of the Japanese had been fully taken into account.

The review also concluded that by using most of the money realised by the sale of Japanese assets for community projects, rather than by distributing it equally among PoWs, the Government did not intend any slight on the PoWs' services.

The Government simply recognised that in Hongkong, the PoWs' sufferings could

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not be fairly distinguished from that of the rest of the community, the review concluded.

The official is convinced that there is no case for Hongkong to change its policy of paying pensions only to those assessed as disabled during service or to the widows and orphans of those killed.

The basis for this conclusion was that it would be invidious to make a distinction between Hongkong's PoWs and the civilian population, which also suffered grievously as Hongkong, unlike Canada, was occupied by the enemy during the war.

Although it is not considered that there is any case for pensions to be paid to all PoWs as of right, the Government and the community have always recognised a special debt to those who served Hongkong loyally during the war, Sir Philip said.

The Government has full confidence, he said, that the Hongkong War Memorial Fund Committee will continue to be generous in their determination of grants and allowances payable to PoWs and other eligible beneficiaries.

Sir Philip said apart from the main conclusions of the review, some points of detail also emerged which the Government will bring to the attention of the War Memorial Fund Committee for their further consideration.

J. C. M. P.

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