

**Don Touhig's 10 Minute Rule Bill on
The Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals
House of Commons, Wednesday, 21 May 2008**

Introduction

The rule bill was heard in the Commons on Wednesday, 21st May 2008. In the context of typical attendances for sessions that follow Prime Ministers Questions, there was a stunning turnout of MPs from all parties present in the House of Commons. This underlines the importance the House places on this issue.

Summary

Don Touhig set out his aim to make the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals (HD Committee) accountable to parliament. His bill proposes that the Committee report to Parliament once each year so that their recommendations can be scrutinised by our elected MPs.

At the present time the HD Committee acts in secret, seldom meets, and never discusses its findings or recommendations in the public domain.

The HD committee has recently made a recommendation that British Malaya-Borneo Veterans could receive a Malaysian medal but they would not be allowed to wear it [The Queen had already been advised not to apply any such restriction on the rest of the Commonwealth].

The HD recommendation is incongruous and impossible to understand and is an insult to British Veterans and to Malaysia. Malaysia is the only Muslim country that wishes to acknowledge the role of our service men and women. It is important to strengthen our relationship with countries like Malaysia, and to honour our servicemen and women who fought in the jungles of Malaysia and Borneo unlike the mandarins who have only fought in the jungles of Whitehall.

MPs have raised serious questions with the HD committee about their confusing and inconsistent recommendation and MPs have requested flexibility from the HD Committee - but have been met only by a wall of silence.

The HD Committee reviewed the recommendation last year in order that British Veterans travelling to Malaysia for the Merdeka (Independence) celebrations could wear their PJM for a week! Why? The reason this recommendation was made was to avoid embarrassment to the Duke of York who went to Kuala Lumpur. His mother, the Queen, had given permission to Australia and New Zealand veterans to wear their PJM, but not to British citizens. It would have been an embarrassment to him and this country if **all Commonwealth forces other than the British** were seen wearing their PJMs when celebrating the Independence of Malaysia that they had fought so hard to preserve. [The British in the UK could not wear their medal – and those returning from Malaysia had to remove their PJM and rebuild their medal bars!] Don Touhig made the point that this was ludicrous and simply not acceptable in today's world.

The wall of silence emphasises that the HD Committee will not allow our directly elected commons to have its say. This is anathema to us and our democratic system in this country.

Some say that the work of the Committee should remain secret but the Commons already scrutinises the work of the British Intelligence Services so it should also be able to rigorously scrutinise the work of the secretive Honours and Decorations Committee.

It is the directly elected Commons that has ultimate responsibility for sending our men and women abroad to place their lives on the line, and it is the Commons that should have ultimate responsibility for decisions such as the wearing of a medal earned during that service.

The current PJM recommendation is a shame on the British nation. This must not happen again and the HD committee's work must be subject to the scrutiny of parliament.

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Don Touhig's Bill was vociferously supported and was not opposed. The Speaker of the House asked who sponsored the Bill and Don Touhig read out a long list of MPs from all the major parties.

The Bill will now go forward to a second reading on Friday, 17th October.

Quotable Quotes:

“As things stand, this House of Commons directly elected by the people of Britain is powerless to do anything about this committee's decisions. [Interjection from MPs – ‘Disgraceful’]. This House of Commons directly elected by the people of Britain is unable to scrutinise the decisions of Unelected Mandarins.”

“Some argue that the issues on medals are sensitive and should not be brought into the public domain - if they do I ask them this. Every year a report is brought to parliament on the working of the British Intelligence Services. If this House can scrutinise the work of Britain's security services, why can't we scrutinise the work of the HD Committee?”

Fight4thePJM Comment:

As one of our team just said to me, the success of today's Bill heralds the final performance of a Whitehall farce!

- Today's unopposed Bill is a significant step forward for the British Foreign Decorations Rules system and for democracy in this country. Those Rules must in future be coherent and be applied consistently. They must also reflect the 'global' world in which we live.
- There is hope that never again will British citizens and the British nation be subjected to such a shameful act.
- There is hope that democracy will be brought to a secret world and those operating in that world will be accountable to our directly elected House of Commons.

The 10 Minute Rule Bill can be watched on <http://www.parliamentlive.tv/Main/> and from tomorrow will be available in the Archive section for 28 days.