

Winnipeg-Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie)—Atomic Energy of Canada Limited—Disposal of nuclear waste.

It being five o'clock, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper, namely, notices of motions.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

[English]

Motions Nos. 14 and 20 allowed to stand by unanimous consent.

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● (1700)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

SUGGESTED EXTENSION OF BENEFITS TO SURVIVING VETERANS OF SPANISH CIVIL WAR

Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview-Greenwood) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider the advisability of providing veterans' benefits to Canadian members of the Loyalist Republican forces who fought in Spain between 1936-1939.

He said: Mr. Speaker, there are few motions which have given me greater pleasure to move and have considered in this House. Basically, what we are attempting to do is have the government and people of Canada finally recognize the contribution made to and on behalf of our country, indeed on behalf of the democratic ideal, by a group of Canadians some 1,250 strong. Without any organized payment by anybody, they decided to take it upon themselves to leave this country, from British Columbia through to Newfoundland, and fight on behalf of the forces of democracy those enemies of democracy who attempted and were eventually successful in overthrowing the democratically elected government of Spain.

As pointed out by my colleague, the hon. member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin), we are dealing with about 200 surviving veterans of the Spanish civil war whose only mistake, if it can be described as a mistake, is that they were anti-fascists before it was fashionably popular to be so. They were the idealists, from all walks of life across Canada, different backgrounds and of different ethnic groups, who recognized something that other Canadians and people throughout the western world were slow to recognize.

They saw that the forces of fascism and nazism were fighting as one. They saw that Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany looked upon Spain as the first arena in which they were going to fight the cause of anti-democracy. They were going to attempt to subvert democratic and liberal democratic institutions. The vast majority of these idealists fought in the battalion now known as the Mackenzie-Papineau battalion.

Veterans' Benefits

Others fought privately and joined other battalions on behalf of the Spanish republican forces.

The first thing the government did in 1936 when these people went to Spain was to declare them illegal. They were made outlaws in their own country by the passage of the Foreign Enlistment Act. In order to get to Spain, they were forced to go hither and yon. They had very little official support from any government or diplomatic agency in Britain, France, or wherever. If they were shot or wounded, they had to rely almost entirely on their own resources and the resources of a number of Canadians who were prepared to contribute to their welfare. Basically, this was a self-help operation.

These people have been described in many ways. One of the most interesting descriptions is by Hugh Garner in his novel "Cabbagetown" which, as many members know, is a description of working class life in Toronto during the depression. At the end of the novel, the hero decides to become one of these idealists who were to fight fascism before it became fashionable. He gives a very good description, a very evocative description, of who some of these people were. In describing these people, Mr. Garner wrote:

They were a ragtag of communists, socialists, trade-unionists, social-reformers, intellectual anarchists, liberals, and the just plain angry, from twenty countries, drawn together by a strange social osmosis, yet each man's reason as individual as he was himself. The Internationals had already proved themselves in the suburbs of Madrid, in University City and Casa Del Campo, these amateurs who sometimes defeated the Spanish regular army, the Moors, the Spanish Foreign Legion, the Carlists, the Falange, the Italian Blackshirt divisions, aided by the German Condor Legion of the Luftwaffe, and the Portuguese. None of them knew it then, but they were already doomed to defeat, not by Spanish fascism, or Hitler, but by the machinators in Whitehall, the Quai d'Orsay and on Washington's Capitol Hill.

The war in Spain was a great and noble cause, a democratic and social democratic cause. It was not, as has so often been described when this matter has been raised as it has in this House on a number of occasions, a private war, with soldiers of fortune going off to fight in it. As I said before, this was the central arena where the forces of fascism decided to become involved. What in fact happened in that war was that Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany—the Luftwaffe, as my friend for Regina West suggests—used that war in order to test their weapons.

Throughout all this time the governments of the west, England, France, Canada and the United States, were following appeasement and the doctrine of appeasement. The notion was that all you had to do was give Hitler a little more, and that was all he would want, it would be sufficient. One had to recognize the principle of absolute neutrality, even though that principle was being breached every day by the fascist powers.

The principle involved here is very simple and basic. The principle is that if the Government and Parliament of Canada can, through the War Veterans Allowance Act and all the legislation which applies to veterans in Canada, provide for pensions and allowances not simply for Canadians, but for members of the allied forces who are now Canadian citizens who fought in World War I, World War II and the South African war, there is no reason why, retroactively, it is not possible to designate those Canadians who fought in the