

*Supply—Veterans Affairs*

that many merchant seamen are unemployed, whether the government has given consideration to bringing them under that legislation.

**Mr. Gregg:** No, Mr. Chairman; no such consideration has been given.

**Mr. Ross (Souris):** A short time ago the minister announced a plan under which veterans other than pensioners could go to military hospitals throughout the country, such as Deer Lodge in Winnipeg, and pay for the treatment they received. I should like to know whether those veterans would have any choice in the matter of the medical practitioner who would look after them, or whether they would simply go there, pay for their treatment, and take whatever medical people were allotted to their cases. Would they have any choice in the matter at all?

**Mr. Gregg:** Mr. Chairman, when my estimates were before the committee a week or so ago the hon. member for Nanaimo delivered an address on item 528, the administration item. That is quite customary; that was the first item, and we are still on it. I am quite prepared to answer questions, but if my hon. friend would permit I should prefer to answer them when I have my officials before me, and in this case when we come to the item covering treatment.

**Mr. Ross (Souris):** I should be quite happy to leave it at that; but the difficulty, which I experienced in another matter this morning, is that we have so many committees meeting now; we are sitting morning, afternoon and night, and it is pretty difficult to be in two or three places at the same time. It might happen that I would not be in the committee when these estimates came up. That is the only reason I raised the question now. It is difficult to follow the matters in which you are interested when the committees are meeting and you cannot be in the house all the time.

**Mr. Gregg:** Then if my hon. friend will accept my answer, which is given without consultation with my officials, it would be that the veteran who elects to go to a D.V.A. hospital for special treatment or service for which he is prepared to pay will be entitled only to the services of the doctors in attendance at that hospital.

**Mr. Harkness:** There still seem to be a very large number of temporary employees in this department. In the two or three years immediately after the war, when the activity of the department was at a peak, naturally it employed a large number of people whom it could not be expected to retain when that activity declined, so that a great many of the employees were not in

the permanent civil service. However, it is now five years since the war ended, and the work of the department has declined as is indicated by the fact that the number of employees has been considerably reduced. Under practically every item, however, I see that the number of temporary employees is still very large in comparison with the number who are permanent.

Under this item there has been a reduction of some 74 employees, but at the same time the number of permanent employees has increased by almost 60; and the temporary employees still number 802 out of a total staff of 1,008. It seems to me that by this time the direction in which the department is going, the number of people who will be required as permanent employees, and those who have proved themselves to be efficient, should have been pretty well determined, and there should not be such a large number of temporary employees compared with the number of permanent employees as we have at the present time. It seems to me that it would give a greater feeling of security to the employees, which would result in greater efficiency in the operations of the department, if a much larger number of those in the department were put on the permanent staff, so they would know they were paying into the superannuation fund regularly, and so on. Would the minister comment on that situation?

**Mr. Gregg:** I hasten to thank the hon. member for his constructive suggestion, and I can assure him that the point he raises is under constant review. He will bear in mind, however, that my department has had a special type of experience during the last five years. My distinguished predecessor and the deputy minister had to expand the department very rapidly in a very short time at the end of the war. That expansion, as reflected in the estimates, continued from year to year. Now we are in the midst of quite drastic reductions, particularly in certain phases of the work of the department, while at the same time making changes and reclassifications in others. As that work is being carried on we are attempting to decide those positions which will be more or less permanent in nature as compared with those of a temporary character; and while we have not made a great deal of progress we have made some. Running over the whole picture on page 312 of the estimates, it will be noticed that as the hon. member has suggested there are some 74 fewer employees coming under departmental administration here at Ottawa.

May I pause here to refer to the point made by the hon. member for Nanaimo the