

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, May 31, 1972

The House met at 2 p.m.

[Translation]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

LABOUR, MANPOWER AND IMMIGRATION

Third report of Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration—Mr. Portelance.

[Editor's Note: For text of above report, see today's Votes and Proceedings.]

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[English]

ORDERS AND DECORATIONS

ANNOUNCEMENT OF MODIFICATIONS AND ADDITIONS TO CANADIAN SYSTEM OF HONOURS—TABLING OF CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I rise at this time to announce certain modifications and additions to the Canadian system of Honours.

Of those many ingredients which, together, are nationhood, one of the most important is the voluntary desire on the part of citizens to contribute to national life. A grateful nation should be willing to recognize and honour those persons whose contributions are truly outstanding, and to this end the government has sought advice from many elements of our society.

It is my pleasure to announce that Her Majesty the Queen, on the advice of the government, has approved the issue of Letters Patent revising the Order of Canada, establishing a Canadian Order of Military Merit and creating three Canadian decorations for bravery.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: In the five years since the Order of Canada was created to recognize outstanding achievement and service it has done more than fulfil our expectations of it. It has been accepted and is respected throughout the country.

The new Letters Patent will increase the levels of membership to three, Companions of the Order, Officers of the Order—and this level will take in those who now hold the Medal of Service—and Members of the Order. As might be expected, existing Companions of the Order and holders of the Medal of Service are generally persons who have achieved prominence on the national scene. The new level, Member of the Order, has been designed to offer deserved recognition to those persons who have chosen to contribute their time and their talents to their own com-

munities, professions or other groups. The importance of these contributions is often no less than those whose efforts have been directed on a broader scale and it is only appropriate that it be officially recognized.

• (1410)

[Translation]

The Order of Military Merit is established to honour professional excellence and exceptional devotion to duty on the part of members of the Canadian Armed Forces. To the honour our armed forces have won in war in Canada's defence we must now add the universal esteem in which our soldiers, sailors and airmen are held as the most experienced and best trained forces in the new, exacting and dangerous trade of peacekeeping and truce observation. To the military ideal of gallantry in the face of the foe must now be added patience and steadfastness in keeping the peace between factions in conflict, stamina and effectiveness in exercising Canadian sovereignty in distant parts of our country, courage and skill in support of the civil power whether it be in rescue operations, disaster relief or, for that matter, fighting forest fires.

The Order of Military Merit has three levels, Commander, Officer and Member. Every serviceman, irrespective of rank, may aspire to appointment to the Order at any of its three levels.

[English]

The Order of Canada, as originally constituted, provided for a Medal of Courage to be awarded in recognition of acts of conspicuous bravery. Although many Canadians have qualified for such a medal, and indeed been nominated for it, it has never been awarded in part because of the problems faced in trying to make one decoration cover a whole range of acts of courage. The government has concluded that what is required is a series of three decorations: The Cross of Valour, the Star of Courage and the Medal of Bravery. These awards will be granted to both civilian and military personnel. Members will remember the tragic events that took place on the destroyer *Kootenay* some years ago, when a number of our servicemen distinguished themselves by acts of bravery. They will now be recommended for Canadian bravery decorations, as will many other Canadians who have put their lives at risk for the safety of others. Preliminary work has been under way for some years, and I am confident that announcements of awards will be made in the near future.

In our constitutional system, the grant of honours is a prerogative of the Head of State, the Queen. As Her Majesty has been sovereign of the Order of Canada since its inception, so she is now also sovereign of the Order of Military Merit and it is by her, as sovereign, that bravery decorations are conferred. The Governor General, in his capacity as Chancellor of the Order of Canada, will con-