

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 6, 1986

The House met at 11 a.m.

[English]

REMEMBRANCE DAY

COMMEMORATION OF SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN

Hon. George Hees (Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to remind Hon. Members and all Canadians that next Tuesday is Remembrance Day.

November 11 will have a special personal meaning for veterans and their dependants. For some it will be an occasion for painful memories as they reflect on the sacrifices that have affected so many families. All, however, will be bound by feelings of pride. Hon. Members, I very much hope that all of us, and indeed all Canadians, will share this pride.

I get many letters from men and women who are concerned that the passage of time is robbing Remembrance Day of its stature. I share these concerns. For nearly 70 years Canadians have been marking Remembrance Day. It could be that familiarity has gradually been breeding apathy. If so, this would be a national shame.

Certainly overseas the contribution of Canadians to the cause of freedom is very well remembered. Every year thousands of French men and women join with us at the Service of Remembrance at the Vimy Memorial in northern France. In this, the fiftieth anniversary of the unveiling of the Vimy Memorial, we will again share in a silent tribute to those who won our country so much honour.

On a smaller but very human scale, I think of the British school children who climb up a hill every Remembrance Day so they can place hand-picked flowers on the lonely grave of a Canadian airman.

Here at home, this Parliament has greatly assisted many members of our veteran population. This population includes some 650,000 veterans of the two World Wars and Korea, approximately 280,000 widows of veterans, and another 350,000 dependants of veterans. On their behalf I want to thank my cabinet colleagues and all Members of the House and Senate for their generous support of the measures the Government has been able to introduce. These measures were directed toward very special Canadians—veterans and their families. I can assure the House that such non-partisan co-operation was and is very much appreciated.

Hon. Members, Remembrance Day must never become a day just for veterans and politicians. It should be a day when all of our nation pauses to reflect on the many blessings we

have inherited from those who lie buried in 70 countries and the seven seas.

Let us never forget that they gave their lives so that we might know peace.

When King George VI dedicated our national war memorial in 1939, he said:

The very soul of the nation is here revealed.

I think the same can be said for all the cenotaphs and war memorials that grace so many of our towns and cities in this country.

My sincere hope is that wherever or however Canadians observe Remembrance Day they will not regard it as a routine duty but as a very special privilege.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Mr. Gaston Isabelle (Hull—Aylmer): Mr. Speaker, as spokesman for the Official Opposition, I want to join the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Hees) in urging all Canadians to observe Remembrance Day with respect and gratitude.

As a nation, we certainly have every reason to be grateful to those who represented this country during the two World Wars and the Korean War. More than 100,000 Canadian men and women made the supreme sacrifice, while among those who did return, some will suffer the effects of the war for the rest of their lives.

● (1110)

[English]

The Official Opposition has been only too pleased to support some fine legislation which has been presented to Parliament. The amendment last spring to increase benefits for those who were forced to suffer for so long in prisoner of war camps was particularly welcome. I also applaud the Minister for immediately recognizing the merits of the Veterans Independence Program, introduced by the Liberal Government, and for becoming one of the program's most enthusiastic boosters.

[Translation]

In the Speech from the Throne, it was announced that 6,000 World War I veterans would qualify immediately for this very progressive program. I was very happy to hear this, and I know that the Minister and all the Members of this House earnestly hope that the remaining 25 per cent of World War I veterans who are not yet eligible for benefits under the Veterans Independence Program, will be given that opportunity as soon as possible.