

*Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act*

seamen who were in battle zones in the war and may have gone through dangerous waters numerous times but did not serve for a period of six months. The determination of that six-month period is very strict.

I evoke the spirit of the Hon. Minister who spoke at Vimy yesterday and said that a nation was forged. That means everyone should be included and if we are to err, let us err on the side of charity to help those who served in the wars and who, because of inequity, are not getting their just pension.

**Mr. Dan McKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Veterans Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs to address the motion now before the House.

While it is not customary for Ministers to participate in these debates, I know that the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Hees) would very much have wished to be here this afternoon. As the Hon. Member knows, the Minister is representing Canada at the commemorative ceremonies marking the seventieth anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. I should add that he is joined by ten Vimy veterans, every one of whom deserves our pride, respect and thanks.

The motion before us is obviously one that the Government would not reject out of hand. Indeed, it was a Progressive Conservative Government which provided civilian war allowance eligibility for merchant seamen in the first place. We have, therefore, always had the interests of merchant seamen very much at heart.

In responding to the motion, we must look at two things: first, why the 180-day requirement was put into the legislation and, second, whether this reasoning has relevance today.

It becomes readily apparent to anyone who reads committee minutes on Veterans Affairs that merchant seamen made countless representations to successive post-war Governments requesting eligibility for War Veterans Allowance benefits. So did the Corp of Civilian Canadian Firefighters in respect of their service in the United Kingdom. The Voluntary Aid Detachment of the St. John's Ambulance, and the Overseas Welfare Workers, who served under the auspices of the Canadian Red Cross Society and the St. John's Ambulance, also made representations. So did the Civilian Air Crew of the Royal Air Force Transport Command. So did the Newfoundland Overseas Forestry Unit make representation for War Veterans Allowance benefits.

The answer was always no until the election of the Diefenbaker Government and the appointment of the late Gordon Churchill as Minister. In Mr. Churchill's words: "One of the first matters I drew to the attention of the officials in the Department of Veterans Affairs was the status of the Merchant Marine, which I mentioned in particular, and other groups such as the firefighters and foresters".

In response, the Minister received all the time worn reasons why nothing could be done to help these groups. To paraphrase Mr. Churchill, he said that the time had come to help, and

that the Department's job was to find a way that would be satisfactory to everyone concerned.

Following consultations with the groups concerned and the veterans' organizations, including the Royal Canadian Legion, the result was the compromise of providing eligibility under the Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act for what amounted to War Veterans Allowance benefits. Parliament passed the legislation by a unanimous vote on February 14, 1962.

The compromise was not an easy one to find because feelings ran very strongly on both sides of the question. Again going back to the post-war period, the argument constantly used to deny income support benefits to merchant seamen was that war veterans allowance was for war veterans only, and not for merchant seaman. Those supporting this view said that bestowing veteran status on merchant seamen would lead to similar status for any civilian who contributed to the war effort in any way.

Merchant seamen justifiably pointed to their heroic, distinguished and very perilous service in supplying food, raw materials, ammunition and so on to our troops, and argued that they had every right to veterans' benefits. The debate was not a pleasant one, and it invariably led to ugly disputes about who did more for Canada during war time.

The six-month requirement enabled both sides to meet each other halfway. After all, any person who served, and voluntarily at that, for six months in the Merchant Marine, and who made at least one trip through dangerous waters, was someone who was well and truly committed to the war effort. No one then or today could dispute that fact.

• (1440)

However, the six month requirement was not just an arbitrary time period drawn out of a hat. Six months' service corresponded with the service time required to qualify for the Atlantic Star, the Pacific Star and the 1939-45 Star. If six months was the period required for enlisted personnel to be awarded such recognition it seemed only reasonable that six months should be the bench-mark for civilians who served in close support of the Armed Forces during war-time.

The motion before us is arguing in effect that one day's service should be enough service eligibility to qualify a merchant seaman for Civilian War Allowance benefits. I say this because a trip three miles out to sea would suffice to be one trip through dangerous waters. This may well be what the Hon. Member has in mind, although I expect all of us are thinking of those who were on the high seas for weeks on end. If so, Mr. Speaker, we are really saying that one day is not enough service time for merchant seamen to qualify, but six months is too long.

As I said earlier, the Government and our Party have never had any hesitation in acknowledging the war-time service of merchant seamen. Our record clearly shows that. For this reason, and given the tremendous improvements made to