

National Defence Act Amendment

the telephone calls I received when I was home for Easter, there is great concern amongst the members of the navy at Esquimalt. Quite a number of these people are afraid to let the way they actually feel be known. This letter is typical of the ones I have received from junior officers and describes some of the penalties that are involved. I should like to read from this letter:

We have seen statements by the Minister of National Defence which imply that dissatisfied personnel may resign with notice—but with no other benefit. Although there have been opinions expressed as to the legality of compulsory conversion from the old services to the new, there has been little emphasis on obtaining for those who do wish to resign, some recognition for services rendered.

To give you a specific example of some of the economic effects presently involved, a 31 year old lieutenant with a wife and three young children would receive: no pension; no rehabilitation leave for 13 years' service; no interest on pension contributions returned (less income tax); no portability of pension beyond the civil service; and no relocation expenses. Since in my own case I should wish to return to the west coast, the cost of moving family and effects would be about \$4,000—a little more than returned contributions. Thus at the very outset of a fresh start I should be in debt.

This is part of the price to be paid for a resignation by a junior officer on a point of principle.

● (5:50 p.m.)

I would ask the minister to keep this in mind. To my knowledge there are a great number of cases of members of the Royal Canadian Navy who would not wish to continue once the unification bill is passed. However, leaving the ranks would make things so difficult for them that they have little alternative but to stay in the armed forces. In effect, Mr. Chairman, this amounts to compulsory service. Surely the minister will realize that people who continue to serve against their will because they are forced to do so for economic reasons cannot give of their best to the navy or to other branches of the armed forces.

The Prime Minister has been strangely silent in this debate. He did make a brief press announcement following Air Chief Marshal Miller's evidence, seeming to be impressed with that evidence. Consequent upon the statement of the Prime Minister we had hoped that he would make a speech in the house. This is a matter of great national importance possibly affecting the security and sovereignty of Canada. Certainly it is causing great doubts in the minds of people across the country. Therefore I feel it is time for the Prime Minister formally to associate himself

[Mr. Chatterton.]

one way or the other with the policy announced by the Minister of National Defence.

Mr. Churchill: Would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Chatterton: Certainly.

Mr. Churchill: The hon. member is mentioning the Prime Minister. Has the hon. member any reason for the Prime Minister's complete indifference to this debate? Is it because the Prime Minister is afraid of the Minister of National Defence?

Mr. Chatterton: This is why I mentioned in the first place that questions are being asked not only by the members of the opposition but also by people across the country. They are asking where the Prime Minister stands on this question. This is a government bill dealing with a matter of great importance to Canada. Yet the Prime Minister has not spoken on it with the exception of an indirect reference to the bill when he had read the evidence given by Air Chief Marshal Miller. Certainly we had hoped the Prime Minister would speak.

The Deputy Chairman: Order. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but the time allotted to him has expired.

Mr. Chatterton: Mr. Chairman, in closing, if I can just urge—

The Deputy Chairman: Does the committee unanimously agree to the hon. member continuing?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Chatterton: If hon. members on the other side listen they do not understand, or what they hear they do not want to hear.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Why don't you make a contribution then?

Mr. Chatterton: Why does the hon. member not stand up and make a speech? A great number of members on the other side remain silent on this question. How many of the ministers on the front benches have stood up and made a speech? The Minister of Transport made a contribution, and I have never heard such a lame defence of any government measure as that made by him. He did not even refer to the subject matter of the bill. But how many other members on the front benches have spoken, Mr. Chairman? After all, this is an important measure. The Minister