

Veterans Affairs

● (1740)

There are other provisions of the act which I think could stand some improvement. However, on behalf of those from Hamilton, Toronto, Windsor, Montreal, Winnipeg, Weyburn, Calgary, Red Deer, Stettler, which I think are the principal areas the troops who took part in the Dieppe raid came from, including prisoners of war who died, such as Sandy Shusterman, who was, shall I say, the moving spirit or founder of the Dieppe Prisoners and Veterans Association, as well as many others who pioneered outside of parliament a strong movement that has culminated in this measure, I say thank you to the government and thank you to members of the House. Naturally they have said thank you many times to the members of the veterans affairs committee.

While attending last year's national conference of prisoners of war in Red Deer I had expressed to me, by all prisoners of war and their dependants who were there, their heartfelt thanks for this consideration that was being given and which hopefully will now come their way.

I also hope that the provision that this legislation shall come into force on a date to be proclaimed is not just a matter of deferral. I would have thought that a generous gesture to these men would be to make it retroactive to the date on which the minister made his announcement that the government had accepted the principle of this measure and that preparation of legislation was going forward. That was the date of the cabinet's decision and it was the date the minister made the announcement. To me, it is only fair under the circumstances to have the legislation made effective from that date.

I note that there is the question of a supplementary estimate or something like that, but why do we always have to look at administrative convenience if we want to make things tidy from the bookkeeping point of view? We are dealing with compensation paid to men, and perhaps to women too who were prisoners of war since the measure will apply to civilian war prisoners. Yet we clutter up our gratitude by bureaucratic tidiness. It would have been far better for the minister and all of us had this legislation been effective from the date of the announcement of this favourable decision that has been taken by the cabinet.

I also regret that there could not be included those who are called escapers. They too went through very trying times, possibly more difficult than others who were prisoners of war. It is hard to measure the relative degree of suffering and privation they endured. Monetary compensation is a very poor measure, but it is the best we can give those who managed to survive, both prisoners of the Japanese, and others. Looking at them today, Mr. Speaker, you wonder how on earth they could ever have been prisoners of war and have suffered any privation at all.

On the other hand, there are people living in Canada, men and women, who went through the horrors of Dachau, Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Some came out from there less than skin and bone and today are not the same people. You would hardly believe that they could have gone through such privation and cruelty, and yet survive. They managed to keep their minds, and apparently that is the best thing.

[Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West).]

It may be said of some that they may get stout. They may round out. But so long as they do not get fat between the ears, that is what counts. I hope that this House will not be too fat between the ears and will compensate these people justly, and that the minister will accept some of the kindly suggestions made by various members in their comments on this bill.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Loiselle (Saint-Henri): Mr. Speaker, I would not want at this stage to be accused of trying to kill the bill. I only want to offer my best wishes to the members of the committee; among all the House committees on which I sat, this is one of the most interesting because there is not political partisanship. All parties cooperate in order that veterans be better understood and protected by the government.

I also want to congratulate the members of all parties sitting on the Committee on Veterans Affairs for their devotion and their willingness in discussing the veterans' problems and I would also thank the various associations which submitted briefs. There is also the department officials from Ottawa and Montreal with whom I discuss veterans' problems from time to time. I wish to thank them for their comprehension and their diligence in discussing and understanding the problems put forward. On behalf of the veterans, I would like to thank them and assure them of my devotion.

I would like to mention what happened to me last spring when I had the opportunity to visit the cemetery in Hong Kong. The brother of a friend of mine lies buried there. I visited the burial grounds and can vouch that it is impeccably maintained. I was with a colleague and I was astounded on seeing how beautifully cared for that place is. I spoke, with the help of our guide who acted as interpreter, to one of the maintenance staff. He was very dedicated to his task, it is almost a vocation which urges him to work in the cemetery. I took a snap of the grave stone of my friend's brother.

To all of you, hon. members of this House and departmental members, I offer my thanks and I am sure everyone will cooperate—there is no doubt about that in my mind—so that this legislation may be passed as quickly as possible for the benefit of our returned soldiers.

● (1750)

[English]

Hon. J. A. MacLean (Malpeque): Mr. Speaker, I have had very little time to peruse this bill, but I pretty well know what it contains and I want to say a few words about its effect or lack of effect on a certain group of ex-servicemen.

Generally speaking, in Canada and in most western countries we go to a great deal of national expense to see that justice is not only done but appears to be done, even in individual cases. We have a very elaborate and expensive system of justice.

I know of several cases regarding a governmental attitude where bureaucrats look at things in the bureaucratic way, with the result that very rough justice is done. They take the attitude that if there are only a few exceptions to the general rule, or relatively few that do not fit into the