

*Government Orders*

In future there will have to be further improvements and increases.

This summer that we might end up with more war veterans. We hope that is not the case but, even as we speak, we are drifting closer and closer to a war. We must be fully aware of what this means.

I do not want to see the Department of Veterans Affairs lose any of its importance. That is why I encourage the minister, and I will support him, in his fight for veterans, even if it is with his own cabinet colleagues. I just hope he would fight harder sometimes.

In any case, the government must do all it can to help bring a peaceful resolution to the Arabian gulf crisis, and for many reasons Canada cannot afford any more wars.

I have what I believe to be and what my legal advice indicates is a reasoned amendment which I will move at the end of my remarks. The bill is intending to help veterans and their dependent survivors. I have congratulated the minister on that. The reasoned amendment I will move calls for this House to proceed no further with Bill C-87. My party and I want to give the government an opportunity to change the statutes or amend this bill before us now to extend war veterans benefits to Canadian merchant seamen who made at least one trip through dangerous waters during World War II.

I should say at this point that we are anxious to have this bill pass through all stages by the end of the day, even if it means, Sir, that we will have not to see the clock. It is shameful that this and previous governments have for 45 years refused to recognize adequately the contributions of these courageous Canadians made during those terrible years.

In response to the minister's answer to my question during Question Period today, I had the feeling that he was trying to leave the impression that the merchant seamen are getting really great benefits even though they are not recognized as veterans. I want to remind the House and the minister of some of the benefits the merchant seamen do not get, that Armed Forces veterans, firefighters, and civilian supervisors get.

• (1620)

For example, a clothing allowance on discharge, they all got it but the merchant seamen got zero. The other three groups got rehabilitation grants, but the merchant seaman did not. The Armed Forces veterans got medical and dental care free for one year, but the merchant seamen only get it if they have a pensionable disability. Surely that is not equal treatment. The others got out of work benefits, but the merchant seamen, perhaps, maybe. The Armed Forces veterans got temporary incapacity allowance, but the merchant seamen did not. The others got vocational training. For the seamen it had to be marine related and they had to be under 30 years of age. Many of those seamen were in their fifties and early sixties, sailing during the Second World War. When they came out, they could not get those benefits.

The others got benefits while they are waiting for returns, but the merchant seamen did not. The Armed Forces veterans got university treatment, but the merchant seamen did not. Federal Public Service preference, yes for the Armed Forces veterans, but no for the merchant seaman. For disability preference, yes for the Armed Forces veterans and the civilian supervisors, but the merchant seamen had to have a handicap. The Veterans Land Act, only if seamen were war disabled. If they are disabled, they are not going to be able to farm any land. Veterans insurance, yes for the other groups, but conditional for the merchant seamen. Veterans business and professional loans, yes for the Armed Forces, but no for the merchant seamen. Reduced rail transportation when they were on leave during the war, Armed Forces veterans got it but no for the merchant seamen.

That is a list of benefits the merchant seamen did not get as compared to the war veterans.

I would like to move a reasoned amendment before I sit down. There is much to praise in Bill C-87. It is clearly intended to help war veterans and their dependent survivors. I look forward to helping pass this bill at all stages today.

I congratulate the minister for taking the initiative in this regard, but I take this opportunity to remind the minister and the House that as a nation Canada has still failed to repay its debt to some veterans of the war against fascism. That is why the reasoned amendment I will move today if it is ruled in order calls this House to