

Routine Proceedings

Remembrance Day gives us the opportunity to express our gratitude and respect for the living and the dead in a personal way by wearing a poppy, by laying that wreath, by bowing our heads in silence.

Our ongoing expression of gratitude and support is expressed every day in a collective sense through the benefits administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Remembrance Day is more than bowing our heads and listening to our community leaders utter fine words in honour of the dead, although that is a sacred aspect of the day.

That part is relatively easy, as any school child released from class to stand beside the cenotaph can tell you. The hard part is manifesting those sentiments in our daily lives. The hard part is remembering as we grumble daily about our problems and our complaints, that we live in the greatest democracy on earth, and that we owe this to our war veterans and to our fallen comrades.

This year, we have an even greater motivation to give thanks for what we have, to honour those who sacrificed so much for our country. Since last Remembrance Day, the Berlin wall has fallen. Czechoslovakia has elected a poet as its president, and the Germans have united.

The world has marvelled for a year at the human capacity for understanding, for unity and for peaceful change. The lesson of Remembrance Day lies not only in horrific images, memories of bloody trenches and the bomb at Hiroshima. It also lies in the images we watch on our televisions this year of East and West Berliners destroying the wall together, of the people of Prague bringing down a dictatorship not with guns, but with burning candles.

I hope, as we all do, that these images are evidence that we are beginning to understand what John McRae was trying to tell us in his poem *In Flanders Fields*. We have an opportunity to use such hard won wisdom in the Persian Gulf situation. All Canadians hope that this war will not break out, that we will not have a new group of war veterans. But if it should happen, and I pray that it will not, I hope that we will continue to show our honour and our respect for these war veterans, both on Remembrance Days to come and on a daily basis, through veterans' benefits and programs.

Mr. Speaker, as we approach November 11 when Canadians will attend services of remembrance, let us continue to honour those who served Canada in her hour of need.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina—Lumsden): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the fine remarks of the minister and my colleague.

I am honoured to rise, on behalf of my colleagues in the New Democratic Party, to share with the House some thoughts and feelings about Remembrance Day. The motto for this important day is "Lest We Forget". That phrase expresses the whole purpose of Remembrance Day, to remember those members of our shared human family who lost their lives in war. Our Canadian sons and daughters who died while serving their country in the wars they have fought are honoured again, as well they should be.

It is important that we do set aside a special day each year to honour, not only those who have fallen and not only those who served Canada in that way, but we should take the day and the hour of the armistice to remember the needless horror and futility of war. The motto, "Lest We Forget", is engraved on our hearts, but have we always kept the pledge implied in this phrase? It is with profound sadness, Mr. Speaker, that I suggest that we have not.

There are many Canadians who served in our forces and many who have died in that service who have not been adequately remembered or recognized. We have long treated with contempt the memory of those Canadians who served with the Republican forces during the Spanish Civil War. These heroes counted in their number Dr. Norman Bethune. These were the first Canadians to enlist in the war against fascism and dictatorship. It is the eternal shame of all democratic governments which refused to come to the aid of a democratically-elected government when invaded by Franco, with the support and assistance of Hitler and Mussolini.

Many Canadians joined the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion and fought honourably, in the same war which the governments of Canada and Britain did not join until 1939. Many of those who fought with the "Mac-Paps" were taken prisoner and tortured. Canada said nothing. We have never officially honoured these brave ones nor