

Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act

reasonable that the same criterion should apply to civilians who seconded the Armed Forces in wartime.

According to the motion under consideration, only one day's service would be enough for civilian war allowances eligibility. For instance, one three-mile sea cruise would be deemed to be a voyage in dangerous waters. This may be the position of the Hon. Member, but I think these allowances were intended for people who have spent several months on the high seas.

Be that as it may, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that only one day's service is insufficient, while 180 days as a criterion may very well be too long. As I said, the Government and our Party in particular have never hesitated to rate merchant seamen wartime service as being acceptable.

For this reason and in view of the significant improvements made to the veterans legislation in the past thirty months, I am glad this motion was debated in the House today.

The debate will undoubtedly make the general public more aware of the important role of merchant seamen, and Hon. Members may rest assured that the Minister of Veterans Affairs will give due consideration to the views expressed today. This concludes my remarks, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you for letting me use the precious time of the House to say what I think of this motion.

● (1500)

[English]

Mr. Gordon Towers (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State for Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, I too take great pleasure in speaking to the motion of the Hon. Member for Vancouver—Kingsway (Mr. Waddell). I know the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Hees) would have liked to have been here because he has said on many occasions that not enough tribute has been paid to the role of the merchant navy in the Second World War.

The Merchant Marine was the lifeline stretching across the Atlantic. Weather, aircraft and U-boats threatened to snap that lifeline but, happily for all of us, it never broke. The Minister himself was a soldier who fought in the battle of the Scheldt. The purpose of that battle was to clear out the enemy so that the Port of Antwerp in Belgium would be opened to allied shipping. This was accomplished and the merchant fleets landed enough supplies to arm, fuel and feed the invasion forces. General Eisenhower said that Naziism was finished when the first ship sailed into Antwerp. Incidentally, it was a Canadian built vessel.

I thank the Hon. Member for allowing us to recall just how much the Armed Forces were dependent upon the merchant navy. The seamen manning those convoys were heroes, fully deserving of the House's time and attention today.

There is another group which also deserves our attention, the wives and girl-friends of those who went off to war. For many of them, the war meant loneliness and worry. A telegram could put an end to life's sweet young dreams. Many

had to bring up families alone, and a fine job they did of raising a generation of young people.

I am glad this Government has been able to do something for these spouses. For instance, one of the first pieces of legislation introduced by the Minister included a measure to help recently bereaved widows or widowers of disability pensioners. Before the Minister acted, the money coming into the family was drastically reduced within 30 days of the death of the pensioner. One month there was a cheque reflecting the married rate; the next month it was the single rate.

● (1510)

We must think of the consequences, Mr. Speaker. The couple could well have had a large apartment on a long lease. There were likely other ongoing expenses linked to the pensioner's physical condition. Yet, on top of great personal loss, the widow had to sustain the double whammy of financial pressure.

I congratulate the Minister of Veterans Affairs, with the support of the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), for showing immediate concern. Widows now receive a married rate pension for one year following the death of a spouse. It is another example of how the Minister and the Government have applied scarce resources very wisely indeed.

I hope all planning with regard to veterans' programs reserve a large place for widows and widowers. It is a fact that women live longer than men. It is inevitable that sometime in the future the number of widows of veterans will exceed the actual number of veterans. By looking after these widows, we will be keeping faith with our veterans and recognizing another type of wartime sacrifice which has largely gone unheralded.

I again thank the Hon. Member for Vancouver—Kingsway for giving us this opportunity to discuss the needs of some very deserving Canadians. He has put his case very well indeed. I am sure his words will be given every attention by the Minister of Veterans Affairs and the Government. As I have shown in the case of those widows, the Minister's record, as well as the Government's record, is one of understanding and compassion.

Mr. Waddell: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Earlier I made reference in my speech to Mr. Knowles being at the table. He is now an officer of the House. It occurred to me that I am not supposed to make reference to the table, to bring them into disrepute. Some of them are disreputable enough occasionally, so I apologize if I—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Order, please. The Hon. Member for Calgary West (Mr. Hawkes).

Mr. Jim Hawkes (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, obviously it is Friday afternoon. After one has a little experience in this place, one knows that there are ways of telling that.

It is a pleasure to rise on this particular Friday afternoon, which happens to follow by one day the commemoration which characterized our news screens last evening as we watched the