

TREATMENT OF RETURNED SOLDIERS ON TRANSPORTS.

On the Orders of the Day:

Mr. CHARLES G. POWER (Quebec South): I desire to draw the attention of the Government to an article which appeared in the Ottawa Evening Journal, and to ask for some information from the Minister of Militia.

Mr. SPEAKER: Is this not a matter about which the hon. member could procure information in the ordinary course by placing a question on the Order Paper?

Mr. POWER: I rather doubt it. It is a matter of considerable urgency.

Mr. SPEAKER: I must say to the House at this early stage in the session, that the asking of questions on the Orders of the Day being called must be used most sparingly and only in cases of peculiar urgency. Hon. gentlemen have the privilege of having questions answered by placing them upon the Order Paper.

Mr. POWER: In this case, it is a question of peculiar urgency, because it refers to the return of soldiers from the front, and I understand that within the next month or so some 15,000 or 20,000 soldiers will return from England to Canada. In the Ottawa Evening Journal there is a despatch from Montreal, dated March 19, which gives the statement of a certain sergeant who returned on a boat which recently arrived on this side:

On our boat they had 103 third cabin berths empty, absolutely empty, while wounded men and furlough men of the first contingent were confined below. They might at least have given these vacant berths to the cripples in the party. There was plenty of room on the boat, but the sleeping accommodation was disgraceful. For men who have seen active service for three and a half years to be kept under deck like that by officers who have never seen the front is a trifle hard to put up with, said the sergeant. You will hear more of it.

I simply desire to ask the Government if it is their intention to take immediate steps to remedy this evil if it exists.

Major-General MEWBURN: This is the first intimation I have had of the article which my hon. friend has read. As regards returned soldiers coming home on transports, the berthing and other arrangements are made entirely overseas, and we, on this side, cannot claim responsibility for such arrangements. Some three or four weeks ago an officer was sent overseas from Canada to take up with the overseas authorities proper berthing accommodation for the

troops coming back. The article referred to is evidently an anonymous one. It does not mention the sergeant's name. If there are any complaints to be made so far as my department is concerned, those complaints should be made in the regular way, and my hon. friend can rest assured they will be thoroughly investigated.

If in the administration of the department I had to stop and pay attention to anonymous letters and anonymous correspondence in the newspapers, no work would ever be accomplished. There is already going on an investigation regarding transports, and a very minute investigation of another subject. As far as this particular article is concerned, I shall be very glad if my hon. friend would have the sergeant he refers to send in his complaint in writing to be investigated.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER.

ELECTION OF MR. GEO. H. BOIVIN, M.P.,
FOR SHEFFORD.

Rt. Hon. Sir ROBERT BORDEN (Prime Minister): The thirteenth rule of the House provides that a Chairman of Committees of the House shall be elected at the commencement of every Parliament as soon as an Address has been agreed to in answer to His Excellency's speech, and the second paragraph of that rule provides that the member elected to serve as Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees shall be required to possess a full and practical knowledge of the language which is not that of the Speaker for the time being. Now your language, Mr. Speaker, is English, although occasionally you make successful excursions into the French language. Unfortunately, we are not blessed on this side of the House with a very large number of gentlemen who fulfil the qualifications required by the second paragraph of the rule which I have just quoted. The junior member for Ottawa (Mr. Chabot) does undoubtedly possess those qualifications, but he finds himself unable to undertake the duties. Possibly, there are one or two other members on this side of the House who might be considered as possessing the knowledge alluded to. However, it has always been the custom in this House that when the Chair is filled by a Speaker of British descent, the Deputy Speaker shall be one who traces his origin to the other great pioneer race in this country. It seems to me inadvisable that we should depart from that practice at the present time. I have spoken to my right hon. friend the leader of the Opposition on