

rafts in the Atlantic ocean when they were torpedoed, but they got the food over there just the same.

I cannot say very much more about them and workmen's compensation, because the government will not do anything for them. But if you want to have a lot of communists around, you can have them if you do not take care of these boys who were incapacitated during those early years and who have no workmen's compensation. Perhaps I have not expressed myself very well. Perhaps the government do not understand what I mean.

Mr. CHEVRIER: I certainly do not.

Mr. SINCLAIR (Vancouver North): I too.

Mr. ROSS (St. Paul's): I will tell you what I mean, if you would like to know. Let your workmen's compensation for these seamen be equal to that received by the boys who fought in the forces. That is all I say.

Mr. CHEVRIER: It is.

Mr. H. G. ARCHIBALD (Skeena): I should like to say a few words on this bill, although I spoke on it during the resolution stage. I can well understand why a bill such as this is being brought in, but there is just one thing I should like to repeat and it is this. If we are to have a merchant marine and to have such laws apply, we must protect the seamen we have at the present time under existing conditions, even forgetting what they did for us during the war. What I should like to see the government bring in along with this is legislation providing protection for Canadian seamen with respect to getting jobs on Canadian boats and providing that the Canadian merchant marine is not to be under foreign registry, such as Panamanian registry, and subject to no marine laws. The unions are protesting this at the present time because they are having difficulty in placing their own men in jobs. I believe it would be pertinent for the government at this time to bring in legislation which would guarantee these men full employment. They have no such compensation as the other sections of the armed forces have, and the decent thing to do would be to guarantee them employment by having a real Canadian merchant marine.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr. Golding): I should like to remind the house that if the minister speaks now, he will close the debate.

Hon. LIONEL CHEVRIER (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I would not rise to say anything in the debate were it not for the fact that the hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Green) has asked certain questions which I think are deserving of a reply.

[Mr. D. G. Ross.]

It is unfortunate to some extent that the debate on this bill has gotten away from its purpose and object. There is no doubt that this debate should not have been one to consider the benefits to merchant seamen. It is one which has to do with compensation for merchant seamen, which is an entirely different matter. In 1946 there was passed by this house a bill which contained the benefits, the compensation and the manner in which compensation should be granted to these merchant seamen. In that bill there was one omission, namely, that those whose benefits or claims arose between the time the regulations came into effect under the War Measures Act in 1945 and the passing of the act in 1946, were not taken care of. There was a gap which the bill seeks to remedy by protecting that right. The only object of this bill is to provide against that, so that any claims which have been filed under the regulations and were not disposed of before the act came into force, will be dealt with in accordance with the terms of the act. That is the only thing this bill deals with.

That brings me to the question which the hon. member for Vancouver South pertinently asks. He says, "Why is it that there is no coverage for merchant seamen prior to the time the regulations came into force in 1945?" and he refers to the Civilian War Pensions Act and a number of cases for merchant seamen which were disposed of under that act. I have no intention of dealing with that act, but I should like to reply to the hon. gentleman and tell him that this matter was considered carefully by the government. First of all, it was considered in 1945 when the war was still on and when the merchant seamen's compensation regulations were enacted, and it was decided then and there, for the reasons which I will give in a moment, that it was not wise to make the regulations retroactive. Then again in 1946, when the act came down, it was debated at some length in the house and parliament gave approval to the principle that compensation be not made retroactive. What I am doing now is simply bringing in an amendment to the act to preserve rights to compensation acquired under the regulations before the act became effective, but not prior to the coming into force of the regulations.

My hon. friend asks why this is done. The reason is this. Today it would be practically impossible, in fact wholly impossible—to establish claims by medical evidence, because in the majority of cases the board would be unable to uncover satisfactory evidence to investigate the claim. We are confirmed in