

● (8:50 p.m.)

Other hon. members have referred to the plight of the Hong Kong veterans in a much more eloquent and forceful manner than I could, many of them speaking from experience. Hon. members have referred to those who have to sustain themselves on disability pensions, pensions which are theirs by right, and to the various shortcomings in the regulations governing these pensions. On that matter I will not dwell at this moment. Suffice it to say that the government has a continuing obligation to the veterans of this country. I think that should be stated over and over and over again until the government is prepared to live to up to that obligation.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. McGrath:** Sir, in the limited time left at my disposal I would like to refer to one matter of particular interest to my province. The people of Newfoundland, in order to perpetuate the site of an outstanding hallmark in our history, the battle of Beaumont-Hamel in the First World War, were granted the lands covering the site of that famous battle which took place on July 1, 1916, in France. By the use of our own financial resources we built an appropriate memorial and provided an appropriate place to bury our illustrious and honoured dead.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. I have to apologize to the hon. member and bring to his attention that his time has expired. He may continue with the consent of the House. Is this agreed?

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Mr. McGrath:** Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the extended time and, realizing the nature of this debate, will not transgress upon the time of the House other than to say that when Newfoundland entered the Confederation of Canada, Canada assumed a responsibility to maintain this memorial, this part of Newfoundland in France, as a part of our war graves, as a part of our national monuments. Now people in my province are very concerned over rumours that have been going about lately concerning our park at Beaumont-Hamel in France, to the effect that the trenches are being filled in and that the area of jurisdiction is being cut down with a view to saving on administrative costs.

I hope that these rumours are without foundation in fact, and that the minister who has responsibility for this department will recognize the obligation the government of Canada has, in being the trustee of this memorial to the Newfoundland war dead, to sustain it in a manner befitting the nature of that memorial.

**Mr. Max Saltsman (Waterloo):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to commence my remarks by congratulating the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall) for introducing this motion, and by congratulating the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr.

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Knowles) for the excellent and pointed amendment he made to it.

Following the Second World War there was a mood in this country in which people were determined to see that veterans, those who had fought on behalf of the nation, on behalf of the liberties we all hold so dear, would be given a fair portion of the rewards that society had to offer, and that justice would be given them in terms of opportunities and as a reward for their service. For a considerable period following the end of the war we maintained this objective in a very strong way. However, as the years went by, as the war faded into memory and as the sacrifices of the men and women who participated in that war faded into memory, it seems that government interest in the veterans took a less urgent turn.

We had all hoped that the minister would rise today and give us some specific and encouraging information on the government's approach to changes in veterans legislation. The minister had an opportunity to speak for half an hour and he made a statement. He said all the right things but, when it was all over, the minister had said nothing. That was a very great disappointment to all of us.

Because of my high regard for the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Dubé) I am prepared to accept his statement that he would like to implement the very good recommendations of the Veterans Affairs Committee. I think he is saying this with all sincerity. But if the minister feels this way, why is the legislation not before the House, or at least legislation incorporating some of the things on which we have all agreed? If the fault does not lie with the minister, surely there is an area in which it does lie, an area that has to be criticized sharply by this House. Who is responsible? The government has the power; it has the means at its disposal. We can only assume that the minister is not the only one who is holding up the legislation, and that the government has very little inclination to introduce veterans legislation. That is a sad conclusion to reach.

It must be obvious to all hon. members that, when it wants, a government can take quick action. I would like to point out some of the quick actions this government has taken. Let us take an instance in connection with the white paper on tax reform, where we had what was supposed to be a total package, somewhat analogous to the situation with respect to the recommendations of the Veterans Affairs Committee. For a long time the government took the position that no part of the white paper could be modified or changed until the finance committee had met, had made its recommendations and the government had had an opportunity to review those recommendations.

However, on a number of occasions while that committee was still sitting the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) announced very great changes in the white paper proposals, particularly with regard to the natural resource industry and more particularly with regard to the mining industry. Does this mean that mining interests in Canada have more say with, more pull over, and more