

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 10, 1977

The House met at 2 p.m.

● (1407)

[English]

REMEMBRANCE DAY

REFLECTIONS ON FIFTY-NINTH ANNIVERSARY

Mr. Speaker: Order. By virtue of the special order of the House made earlier this month, the hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald).

Hon. Daniel J. MacDonald (Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I remind hon. members and all Canadians that tomorrow, November 11, is Remembrance Day. Tomorrow will mark the fifty-ninth anniversary of the ceasefire of the first World War. I suggest that we pause a moment to reflect on the bravery and sacrifices made by Canadian men and women in that holocaust, and in the second world war and the Korean conflict. Our feeling for them is deep and humble.

More than 100,000 Canadian soldiers, sailors and airmen and women served together and died for that ultimate goal, the goal of preserving our democracy and our country. In these days, when many Canadians are concerned about the unity of our country, it is well to remind ourselves of those who gave their lives for its survival. These men and women fought, not for personal gain, nor for glory or for conquest. They fought for their homeland. This was their love. Duty was their creed. Truly they are Canada's heroes.

I would like to remind hon. members of the biblical reference engraved on the memorial arch which connects the Veterans Memorial Buildings here in Ottawa:

All these were honoured in their generations and were the glory of their times.

We, as Canadians, have a special obligation to perpetuate the memory of those who gave their lives for Canada. Let us, in our time and in our way, be worthy of them.

Mr. Speaker, before I conclude my remarks this afternoon I would like to read something that was sent to my office a few days ago by a young Canadian friend. It is entitled "A Prayer for Today", and was found among the effects of a Canadian infantry sergeant who perished outside Ortona in Italy on a day in December, 1943. It reads:

Today a bird sang for me. Today I leaned against the strong trunk of a living tree. Today a little lizard ran across my hand. So I am not alone. When I get back to Canada I'll remember this. I will cherish all of life, for all life is really one. I will never again be a destroyer, though that is what man is. This is my dream, that we will learn to live in harmony, not between man alone, but with the whole living world.

Let us, the living, keep the faith of this Canadian sergeant, so that the incentive of this day may speed us onward and toward a better world of peace, freedom and justice.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jack Marshall (Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my party and my leader I join with the minister and all colleagues in the House of Commons in paying tribute to our fallen comrades today, prior to the Remembrance Day ceremony which will take place tomorrow at our national memorial in our proud capital city.

In this time of uncertainty, it should be remembered that some 63 years ago thousands of young Canadian citizens answered the call of the then government of the day to volunteer to go to far off lands, to offer their lives, and in too many cases to give those lives, to preserve peace and freedom, not for Canada alone, but to help protect our allies, whose problems must have been difficult to comprehend.

But it is obvious that their efforts were in vain, for on two future occasions, during the second world war and the Korean War, more of our young men and women again answered the call because our world leaders could not preserve that peace and freedom which we as Canadians treasure so dearly.

However, the passage of time has now brought about a generation for whom World War I has become very remote, and for whom even the other conflicts have no meaningful place in their experience. It is incumbent upon us, we who sit in this hallowed House of Commons, many of us veterans ourselves who experienced the bitter taste of war, to remind ourselves that we are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that some 100,000 veterans who died did not die in vain. And we must continue in our efforts to preserve peace, a measure of prosperity, and above all national unity, because of our commitment to the veterans of Canada.

It is tragic, however, Mr. Speaker, that in this year 1977, while hundreds of thousands of our citizens will attend ceremonies across this land to honour and to pay homage to those who made the supreme sacrifice to preserve Canadian unity, we are threatened with national disunity from within our great country, a threat to our freedom that breaks faith not only with those who fell, but with those who remain, the maimed, the disabled, and those dependents who must wonder today, was their sacrifice in vain.

● (1412)

We can only hope that Remembrance Day, 1977, will instill in the hearts of those minorities, those who are taking this country for granted, those who attempt to fracture a way of opportunity and a quality of life brought about by the suffering and sacrifice of Canadians regardless of race, creed or colour, a reminder of the fact that these men fought together