

*Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act*

afternoon to say a few words in support of the motion of my colleague, the Hon. Member for Vancouver—Kingsway (Mr. Waddell). I think it appropriate to take a moment to read the text of the motion as follows:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider the advisability of amending the Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act by eliminating the condition for entitlement of serving at sea for at least six months in order that one trip through dangerous waters would be the only qualification necessary for the Civilian War Allowance—

This is a rather special occasion for many of us in this House, myself included, who were too young at the time of the last war to serve our country. I recognize that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. McKenzie) served our country. My colleague, the Hon. Member for Spadina (Mr. Heap), trained and was ready to serve as the war came to an end but never had the opportunity to go overseas. I noticed earlier in the Chamber our colleague, the Hon. Member for Burlington (Mr. Kempling), and I am well aware of his record, and the records of many others.

As my hon. friend from the Liberal Party has indicated, it is because they were prepared to serve and give the ultimate sacrifice, their lives, knowing the suffering, torment and worry that resulted to their families as a result of their service, that we are able today to consider a motion to recognize the service of those people who served in the Merchant Marine but do not fall within the appropriate regulations to be entitled to financial recognition, though they were willing to lay their lives on the line for Canada.

My hon. friend from Vancouver—Kingsway reminded us of the very eloquent words of the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Hees) at Vimy Ridge when he indicated that it was at Vimy Ridge that the nation of Canada was forged. I know that all of us in the House have been supportive and appreciative of the work done by the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

When we consider those who served in our Merchant Marine and who were quite prepared to sail through dangerous waters, and know that those individuals are likely now about the age of 60, and when we consider the contributions they made and the willingness with which they approached their careers to serve Canada during hostile times, it seems to me that the least we can do is recognize that contribution and provide them access to the benefits provided by the Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act.

This would not involve much money when we consider the relatively small number of Canadians who would be involved. As the Parliamentary Secretary has pointed out, not all would take advantage of this opportunity. However, those who need financial support and those with families who could use that financial support would be entitled to this allowance.

There is no question that we owe it to these individuals to at least refer this motion to the appropriate committee for further consideration. Perhaps there are other ways more appropriate—even better ways—to recognize their service to Canada and to provide appropriate compensation.

We must consider the sacrifices they made for us. As I have said, many of us were not old enough to serve our country. We only see the embattlements, for instance in my Province of British Columbia on the West Coast and around the City of Vancouver. We can see the remnants of the big gun placements which were used to protect our coast from invasion. That is as close as we get. Yet we all know individuals who served, not only in the Canadian services but also in the Merchant Marine. We know the lives that they led during those difficult times.

I now wish to read for Members of the House a motion put forward at the 1986 Convention of the Royal Canadian Legion. As a member of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 213 I wish to say that the motion presented at the convention in terms of the merchant navy was a thoughtful one. It is a motion that received a great deal of consideration before it actually went to the convention floor. It states:

WHEREAS Subsections 75(1) and 75(2) of the War Pensions and Allowances Act, stipulate that a Canadian Merchant Seaman, to be eligible for the Civilian War Pensions and Allowance must have served at sea for a period of six months, and during that period at sea, made at least one trip through dangerous waters; and

WHEREAS during a lesser period than six months, a Merchant Seaman may have made numerous trips through dangers waters:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Subsections 75(1) and 75(2) be amended so that one trip through dangerous waters would be the only qualification necessary for Civilian War Allowance on the part of Canadian Merchant Seamen.

In a sense that is what the motion of my hon. friend encompasses. When we consider the work done by the Royal Canadian Legion for so many years, and the extremely important work it continues to do on behalf of Canadian servicemen and women, and the concern it has indicated in terms of the merchant navy, individuals who would now be eligible for some compensation if this motion is passed, I encourage Members of the House to give the motion the opportunity to be referred to the appropriate committee for further consideration.

The six-months qualifying service for civilians was established to correspond with the service time that was required by merchant seamen for the receipt of war medals such as the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star and the Pacific Star. Thus to qualify for the allowance this length of service was considered to be the minimum time requirement for civilians who served in close support of the Armed Forces during wartime.

I think that today in April of 1987 it is time that we recognize those who served in our Merchant Marine. It is time for us to recognize those who were prepared to sail through extremely dangerous and hostile waters to serve their country. This is but a small way of saying as a Parliament: "We recognize your contribution. We appreciate your contribution. We want to acknowledge it by making you eligible under the appropriate compensation program."