

### Veterans' Benefits

Spanish civil war on behalf of the Spanish forces as equally entitled.

I want to anticipate for a moment the response of the government and of many people. The first statement is that they were simply soldiers of fortune and we cannot go around subsidizing people who fought in any individual war anywhere in the world, that it has to be a war officially declared by the Canadian government. Let me deal with that problem very briefly.

● (1710)

I do not see why, retroactively, Parliament cannot admit that perhaps the Government of Canada made a mistake when it passed the Foreign Enlistment Act. I do not see why Parliament cannot recognize that those people, whose only mistake was to have been unfashionable, should now be granted some recognition by virtue of the fact that the war which they were fighting in Spain was exactly the same cause which so many other Canadians fought and died for only three years after the Spanish civil war began. In fact it was the continuation of precisely the same kind of battle between the same kind of forces. The fight between Vichy France and Canadian troops, the fight between fascist Germany and Canadian troops, and the fight between fascist Italy and Canadian troops was exactly the same fight as the fight between fascist Spain and those Canadians who chose to ally themselves with the Spanish republican forces in 1936.

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

**Mr. Rae:** Indeed, the Spanish government itself has now recognized this by granting pensions to all those who fought on whatever side. If the Spanish government is capable of doing that and capable of attempting to rebuild its democratic institutions, recognizing that retroactively one can attempt to rectify mistakes one has made, I see no reason why the Canadian government should be any less generous and less forthright. We are not dealing with tens of thousands of individuals, because we are not dealing with vast amounts of money, we are dealing with a principle.

Some will say, "Well, if we do it in one case, we will have to do it in every other case." All I can say is that this is a matter for the discretion of Parliament. It is for Parliament to decide that, on balance, those Canadians who were fighting in a given theatre of war were in fact fighting for principles and ideals, the same principles and ideals for which Canadians themselves were officially engaged to fight some years later. I say it is an important act of discretion for us to be able to do this.

Let me say very briefly, Mr. Speaker, that when my colleague, the hon. member for Regina West, raised this matter most recently in Committee of the Whole, as I have been raising it and as our leader raised it last year, he put a question to the minister with respect to the treatment that is being accorded to those 200 Canadians who live throughout Canada, many of them in very difficult conditions. When he raised this question, as reported at page 2731 of *Hansard* of July 9 of this year, he was told by the minister:

Mr. Chairman, I planned to make some reference in this regard but I see that time is moving on. The hon. member may not know but this is under consideration by the department. I have no answer for him today other than to say that it is under consideration.

I had discussions about this matter with the minister, the Hon. Daniel MacDonald, when he was alive, and he indicated to me privately that he was considering the matter and that he realized the difficult circumstances in which many of these veterans found themselves. He realized the anomalous distinction between those veterans who fought in the Spanish civil war and went on to fight for the allies and who were receiving pensions, and those veterans who were so ill after 1939 that they were unable to continue fighting, and who are receiving no pension.

I look forward to hearing the government's response because it is a matter of principle, it is a matter which involves, I think, the exercise of collective compassion on the part of this Parliament, and also a question of retrospective political judgment, to recognize that the official wisdom of the time was the wisdom of appeasement. In Canada, the official wisdom was the wisdom of not getting involved in any foreign wars.

If you read the diary of the Prime Minister of the day you will see that when he went to visit Hitler, he was very impressed. He thought that a marvellous experiment was going on in Germany and he could not understand what all the fuss was about in Spain. There were many, many Canadians, not all of whom fought in the Spanish civil war but many of whom fought in the Second World War and worked for the government in different ways, who recognized the fact that the policy of appeasement, the official wisdom of the time, the official policy of Chamberlain, the official policy of Daladier, that policy, was bound to lead, as it inevitably did, to the Second World War because, unless Hitler was resisted in Spain, unless he had been resisted years before in Germany, unless he had been resisted in the 1920s in his country, one could see the writing on the wall in terms of the intentions of the nazi idea, the notion of total domination of Europe by a totally reactionary and inhuman philosophy.

There were many people who were wrong about Hitler, many people who were wrong about Spain, many people who unofficially decided that they would take it upon themselves to do something in which they believed, which was to fight in a war which was not popular. So they were declared effectively to be outlaws by their own government. But when you read the description of the return of the Mackenzie-Papineau battalion to Toronto in 1939, you recognize the fact that this was a popular and courageous thing to do. By that time, in 1939, the public of Canada recognized the fact that indeed these people had a great deal of courage and deserved recognition.

I want to conclude my remarks now, Mr. Speaker, because there are a number of other hon. members who want an opportunity to speak and because I want to hear from the government. I think this is a matter on which it should be possible to achieve some agreement. I want to close by quoting from George Orwell's book "Homage to Catalonia". George Orwell was even more courageous, unofficially, than others. He decided to fight his own group on the left among whom there