

Government Orders

I am worried by the apparent tendency toward delegating responsibilities from the Canadian Pension Commission and the Veterans' Appeal Board to departmental ministers. This is a dangerous precedent, because if adjudication duties come under the auspices of the bureaucrats, responsibility and accountability are in danger.

I am also concerned with the response of government resolutions arising from veterans conventions, which is either too slow or lacking altogether. Some areas of urgent priority to veterans are the elimination of delays in addressing pension applications. I know it has come a long way, and it has a lot farther to go, of course.

The ineligibility of widows to benefit from pension increases assessed after their spouse's death, the payment of proportionate rather than full pensions to widows, payments to serving members of the forces through sustained disabilities which restrict promotion, transfer and review of the basis of disability pension rates, inequity of the War Veterans' Allowance Act which must be corrected is a requirement that veterans or their widows must be a resident in Canada when applying. Before the allowance can be paid outside of Canada, the recipient must have a continuous total of 12 months residency in Canada.

This may seem quite all right at the outset. Many people, some of them who did not return home from overseas after the war, live in the United States or other places. They would benefit greatly because these people are not the people who are buying shares in Air Canada or Petro-Canada. These people are living far below the poverty line, and it would seem only fair that the veterans or their widows who cannot return to Canada be eligible for this allowance.

The War Veterans' Allowance Program is intended to meet the basic needs of veterans. In order to maintain a reasonable quality of life, some additional income from casual earnings, interest on savings and rentals are exempted from calculating income. However, the last increase in the casual earnings exemption was in 1985 when it went from \$100 to \$140.

Veterans' associations believe that an exemption of at least \$500 per year is more realistic and that increases should be at least equal to the Consumer Price Index gain since 1985.

I cannot stress enough how important and how urgent these matters are for our veterans and their dependents. They must be addressed now, not in a matter of years.

Another matter which has been raised by the veterans and others across the country is recognition of the contribution made by merchant seamen during Canada's war effort during the two world wars and Korea.

While merchant seamen were not members of the Armed Forces, they played a crucial role in the war effort. Without the merchant navy, our forces would have been deprived of vital supplies of food, weapons, ammunition, vehicles, fuel and other essential items which were necessary to ensure our victory.

We have the cold statistics of men killed and ships lost to remind us that although the merchant seamen were not members of the Royal Canadian Navy, they ran the same risks and too often paid the same price.

They did it for the same reason. They did it to defend their country and its values. They deserve the same recognition and the same support that we give veterans of the forces.

Since 1941, the Government of Canada has recognized the equality of service and sacrifice of the merchant navy by awarding the Silver Cross to the widows and the mothers of those merchant seamen who gave their lives in war.

It seems strange to me that we recognize the equality of service and sacrifice with this medal, but we do not recognize the equality of service when it comes to granting equal benefits to those merchant seamen who returned. To put it bluntly, if a merchant seaman was killed, he was a hero. If he returned, he was a forgotten civilian.

In 1962, in response to pressure from the Canadian Legion and the Merchant Navy Association, the Canadian government made an effort to recognize the service of these people by passing Part X1 of the Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act, which granted them the equivalent of war veterans allowance. In view of this, it was not too much to expect that when the government extended what is now called the veterans independence program, or VIP, to the recipients of the war veterans allowance, the merchant seamen would be eligible for VIP, but they are not.