

we might have a totally different act or a series of acts which would give to these seamen all the benefits that the veterans of the armed forces received, less perhaps certain items which the minister might feel should be excepted because of the special nature of the service of the merchant seamen. If we go on as we are doing now, simply taking one little bite at the problem, I think we shall find that what has been a grave injustice perpetrated on the merchant seamen will continue despite our efforts.

It will not do us any good just to get up and discuss these matters on the estimates. We should first establish the principle that the merchant navy was the fourth arm of the service and the minister should bring in legislation carrying out that principle. Then he might find that it would be better to deal with compensation cases before 1945 through the veterans affairs department, rather than under workmen's compensation. All during the war these merchant seamen were treated as civilians. I have the reference in 1942 when the then minister of finance, in refusing to exempt merchant seamen from income tax, gave as a reason for his refusal the administrative difficulties in exempting people employed by private owners of ships. The administrative difficulty there apparently was the only thing that made these seamen liable to income tax.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but I should remind him that this bill deals with compensation to merchant seamen for injuries sustained. I do not think the act is wide enough to allow of a discussion of the income tax merchant seamen pay or of other benefits they might receive for having served in time of war, and I would ask the hon. member to confine his question to compensation for merchant seamen.

Mr. MERRITT: I shall certainly endeavour to keep within Your Honour's ruling. I mentioned income tax merely to illustrate what I was going to say. When we find that because these men are treated as civilians administrative difficulties interfere with their exemption from income tax I very much fear that even if we carry back the workmen's compensation principle before 1945 we shall come up against other administrative difficulties which will again put obstacles in the way of these seamen receiving benefits. I submit to you, sir, that I am speaking very much to the principle of the bill and the principle of the whole question of compensation for merchant seamen when I say that if a

[Mr. Merritt.]

more generous principle were adopted behind this present measure, and if the merchant seamen were treated as the fourth arm of the service, then we would find this bill containing more generous provisions for the merchant seamen than if we continue to treat them as individuals who were engaged in a normal civilian pursuit, which is obviously the principle upon which this bill was founded.

It must be quite clear when you consider the figures, 1,400 merchant seamen in 1939 and 13,000 in 1945, that these men were not there in a normal civilian capacity as merchant seamen, but were there directly in pursuance of the war effort. When you have met some of them and learned their ages and the fact that many of them were schoolboys and that most of them had not engaged in seafaring before the war, then again it seems perfectly apparent that we must not treat them as civilians and must not provide for them only the kind of benefits which are ordinarily accorded people in a civilian capacity.

The very fact that this bill is a workmen's compensation bill worries me more than any other feature of it. If the government intended recognizing the other and more important principle, here would have been a splendid opportunity to introduce it. One could go on multiplying examples of the way in which these individuals were treated as civilians, doing an ordinary civilian task. For instance, there is the case of vocational training, which was restricted to those who wished to continue their career at sea. When you look at the figures of the total who served, and think of the size of the merchant navy before the war and in 1947 again you see that was not intended as a war benefit. The idea that these people were carrying on a normal civilian trade was prevalent in the minds of the officials of the department if it was not present in the minds of the minister and the government. I urge the minister, before his estimates come down, to give further consideration to changing the whole principle and dealing with the whole subject at one time.

Mr. D. G. ROSS (St. Paul's): During the last war a great many boys from my riding, a great many boys from the great lakes, who tried to enlist in the army or the air force were turned down because they were not fit, and these boys went into the merchant marine and fought the battle of the Atlantic.

How many of you members of the House of Commons have been out sailing in the early spring when your dinghy upset? How many of you have been out in the cold waters in different places at that time of the year? How