

Veterans Land Act

MR. MARSHALL: Is there any consideration being given to reducing the lot requirements?

MR. MACDONALD (CARDIGAN): That is also under consideration.

The minister also told the committee that the whole matter was to be discussed the next day in cabinet. We all know the result. There was not one breath of concern or commitment to their responsibility, not one ounce of recognition of their colleagues, just a forelorn dedication to stay in power at all cost. This is a government without leadership or compassion and which disregards the needs of the people.

Watch what will happen when we pass this bill. Watch the next issue of *The Carrillon* which is produced by the Department of Veterans Affairs. I can see the headline now: Government agrees to extend Veterans Land Act deadline because of its concern for veterans. The people of Canada, will be told that, after considering all the factors, the minister did not mean it when he said an extension was not warranted and this is being done because of the government's sincere concern. The ridiculous thing about this whole matter is that the exercise does not accomplish anything other than deny the veteran something he wants, something for which he would commend the government, namely, an act that is consistent with Canada's housing policy. The continuance of this measure fills a needed service, that of looking after the housing needs of a wide segment of our population.

The staff administering the act will be in existence for many years to come. They are under-staffed and over-worked because of the backlog of applications. Most important, they are frustrated because they have to give an explanation to veterans who do not have the difference between the \$15,400 the act grants them and the cost of a lot or small holding, yet they get the blame. The annual report indicates the staff has been reduced from 535 to 494. The reason given is the phase-out. However, the real reason is that the staff is frustrated and discouraged because the restrictions on loan ceiling and lot requirements prevent them from helping the veterans.

In a newspaper the other day, the minister was quoted as saying he estimated that only 10,000 of the over 100,000 eligible would apply under the new extension and it would cost the government \$50 million. Nothing could be further from the truth. He said the same thing last year, that only 10,000 would apply. We have reached the deadline and the minister says there will be another 10,000 applicants.

I do not blame the minister, but if his government were sincere, it would extend the deadline, increase the loan ceiling and many more veterans would be served. Where did the minister get the cost figure of \$50 million? The annual report shows an administration cost of \$11 million per year. It is reducing each year and \$26 million is being collected each year in interest. Probably the \$50 million he referred to is being charged against the \$100 million demonstration program which the Minister of State for Urban Affairs (Mr. Basford) announced the other day. They can spend that amount, but they cannot lay out \$50 million for housing for veterans. They want to cut that back.

There is no earthly reason for phasing out this act until every last veteran has been served. This should be the course of action for this government. They can do this

[Mr. Marshall.]

because the administrative staff, to some degree, will be required for the next 25 years. However, I suppose we should be thankful for this small concession which will serve a good number of veterans. I am pleased that there is still some hope for the parliamentary process. The will of those we serve can be imposed upon the government even in spite of the greatest objections. I just want to repeat that after second reading, we agree to going into committee of the whole. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre indicated agreement to this procedure on a point of order. I am sure that can be done without introducing any amendments.

In conclusion, I wish to commend the minister on the job he is doing. I realize the difficulty in convincing the cabinet on the recommendations he places before them. I am sure if we could listen to what is said, we would hear the minister putting a good case for the veterans. Unfortunately, he is not with the right government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Marshall: We are pleased to get this small concession. We will support anything which will get this bill through as quickly as possible. We want it passed before Friday. I do not want to say what I feel in my heart might happen if it goes beyond Friday.

● (1610)

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, when the minister concluded his speech this afternoon in which he called for the House to support this bill extending the deadline with respect to the Veterans' Land Act until March 31, 1975, he said this:

It should be made quite clear that we are not doing this as a favour to veterans but simply as a right which they have earned.

I am sure that all of us in this House appreciate the minister's putting it that way, and we underline and emphasize it just as strongly as we can. However, I am also sure the minister will not be surprised if some of us in all parties in this House feel that the right that the veterans have earned so far as the Veterans' Land Act is concerned includes more than that which is being granted in this bill.

Like the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall), I say on behalf of this party that we do not want there to be any hiatus, any break at all. We want to see this legislation passed before tomorrow so that the March 31 deadline will be extended for one year. At the same time we regret that this bill, so simple and so narrow, fails to deal with a number of other issues that desperately require consideration so far as the Veterans' Land Act is concerned. Many of us have a great deal of correspondence with veterans, much of it regarding the Veterans' Land Act. My own has increased tremendously in the last few days. Much of it is with veterans who will not be covered by this change.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): No, they are not covered; many are still in the services.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Many of them are still in the services and will not be able to seek a small holding until some time after March 31, 1975. Many of