

Veterans Affairs

of Canada I hope I will be allowed to reserve the amenities and courtesies on the selection of our presiding officers to a later date, perhaps the budget debate. But I would not like the opportunity to go by without saying that your selection as Deputy Speaker was a personal joy to me.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McCleave: Now, because others wish to take part in the debate and the hour goes apace, I should like to make a plea, as short and simple as I possibly can, from a member who is a non veteran to a minister who is a veteran. I say to the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) that there is no way in which the people of Canada can thank him enough for what he himself personally underwent on behalf of this country. There is no amount of money that can ever compensate him for what happened to him, and there is no way in which Canadians can sufficiently express their gratitude, although we have tried in a humble way with various programs in the Department of Veterans Affairs.

However, I must say that I think he was wrong when he said at the veterans' meeting in St. John's, Newfoundland, that the time had now come to put the veterans' problems in the same category as the problems of the older members of our population. I think that was wrong, because we make exceptions almost every day in our treatment of distinctive segments of the Canadian population. For example, a few days ago there was a considerable feeling, among members of the House at least, as to whether the Indian housing problem was being properly tackled. And so the story goes, but I will not take time to list other examples. Obviously we are a House which is capable of drawing generalizations, but also capable of making exceptions to those generalities.

My sole point in rising at this time is to say that I think most Canadians have no objection to continuing every veterans' program to the last veteran who is left in Canada, expensive though that program may be, because it is a distinctive way in which we can say thank you to people who have allowed Canada to be what it is today.

Mr. MacDonald (Cardigan): Mr. Speaker, I wish to rise on a question of privilege. I want to answer the hon. member opposite. He asked me if I was claiming, with regard to a person who wanted to establish in Alberta and who had served in Germany—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I regret to interrupt the minister but I must point out that to allow the minister to speak at this time would be to give him the floor a third time. This can only be done with the unanimous consent of the House. Are hon. members ready to allow the minister to answer the question, with the knowledge that there are other members who wish to speak?

Mr. Marshall: I myself would certainly be willing, Mr. Speaker, but there are members here who have been waiting to speak for some time and they should be granted an opportunity to do so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Chair cannot guarantee any time before six o'clock.

[Mr. McCleave.]

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): I think that in the circumstances we cannot give our consent at this point. But we do not want it to be construed as refusing the minister an opportunity to answer the question put to him. However, in the circumstances we cannot give him our consent at this time because of the rules.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: May I suggest that if there is a minute left before six o'clock, we could come back to the question.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, having listened to this debate I realize that there is a point that some of my friends on the government side have missed. Many of them have said, and have freely acknowledged, that there are still many problems that veterans are facing who did not obtain certification in 1968 and for whom, for a number of reasons, it is impractical now, in the remaining months of existence of the Veterans' Land Act, to make application. That has been freely admitted by a number of government speakers, but they have all said that they recognize this, and of course in time and on a proper occasion they will consider doing something about it.

● (1740)

The hon. member for York East (Mr. Collenette) ended his speech with what can be termed the pious hope that his government would, of course, if there was a single injustice give it appropriate consideration at the appropriate time and, I suppose, do something appropriate. What the government is asking us to accept is the elimination of a bill that gives rights to veterans which the minister admitted they have, Mr. Speaker. It was not too long ago in this House that he said, as recorded at page 948 of *Hansard*:

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.

That right has been accepted by the government. That principle has been accepted, yet hon. members on the government side have said it will be done away with because it has outlived its usefulness. But they have not said what they are going to put in its place. I repeat that, Mr. Speaker. Not a single member on the government side in this debate has indicated what the government intends to do to secure those rights that it has admitted do exist. That is the weakness in their position. It is more than a weakness; it is a glaring defect in the logic of their utterances.

I am not going to get into the question of whose motives are sound and whose are right. I did not enter this debate to quibble over the sincerity of hon. members in the matter, and I would hope that some of those who have quibbled about it will not quibble about sincerity of motivation the next time they debate in the House. The reaction of hon. members this afternoon has been quite evident.

It has been suggested that we are in this situation today because the government was forced into legislation which gave the right to 25 members, upon petition, to have a matter reviewed. It has been said that the Veterans' Land