

Veterans Affairs

Council should be appended to today's *Hansard*. I took it that since there was no objection to that, it was agreed that that would be done.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

[Editor's note: For text of statement referred to, see Appendix "A".]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

VETERANS' LAND ACT

REQUEST FOR REVIEW OF TERMINAL DATE OF PROGRAM

The House resumed from Tuesday, November 5, consideration of the motion of Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):

That this House calls on the Minister of Veterans Affairs to review the terminal date of March 31, 1975, now specified in the Veterans' Land Act, and to report thereon to the House within the time limit set out in chapter 3 of the Statutes of 1974.

Mr. Donald W. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Mr. Speaker, on the eve of the solemn ceremonies of November 11 I rise with pleasure and pride to participate in this debate on the Veterans' Land Act on the motion proposed by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) and so ably supported by my colleague, the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall). But I do so with certain misgivings because of the broken commitments by this government, especially with regard to veterans and the armed forces. It was for that reason that I indicated last evening, before calling it ten o'clock, that I could not share the confidence of my friend, the hon. member for Mercier (Mr. Boulanger), who preceded me in the debate.

I suggest that in a manner of speaking this whole debate is a comment, and not a very favourable one, on the government's credibility and reliability. A year ago we started out with unanimity. That unanimity has been wearing away, and now we find the government backing off. In veterans affairs, as in so many other areas, the government seems determined to run roughshod over the demands of this House. It lacks respect for this House.

Only yesterday we observed an example of the roughshod manner in which the government treats this House. As a relatively new member of the House I was literally appalled at seeing the government House leader, and then another prominent member of the government, rise to question a ruling of Mr. Speaker. I had been led to believe that that was just not done. However, we observed it yesterday; we saw once again the manner in which the government is prepared to ride over the rules of the House, and is trying to run the House for its own convenience.

What do we observe today in relation to this debate? We see the unanimous consent of the House of a year ago being reneged. A year ago almost to the day, on November 9 to be exact, as we were reminded by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, this House agreed unanimously to

[Mr. Speaker.]

a motion under Standing Order 43 to have the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) re-examine the Veterans' Land Act with a view to extending the deadline for applications for benefits under the act. This was a unanimous agreement, let me emphasize.

What do we hear now? We hear vague hints and suggestions and what I would like to describe as weasel-word promises, and a gradual withdrawal by the government from a position it held as a minority government in a delicately balanced House. It is withdrawing from that position because it now has a majority. Could we suggest that member's of the government agreed a year ago to this study simply to build up their credibility in an election that they knew would have to come soon? Now that they are in a majority position, we hear a different song. I suggest that this is characteristic of this government led by this Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau).

We saw it yesterday, and we heard it today also. Yesterday we heard the minister back away from his position. My comments are not directed toward the minister in person—I want to make that clear. I have great respect for him and his personal devotion to the veterans. But he is not supported by his government led by this Prime Minister. I feel that the minister has been compelled to back down by the failure of his colleagues to give him the support he needs in cabinet. I think that this is reprehensible. They have ganged up on him. Withdrawing from earlier commitments is all too characteristic of the government.

We have heard the promises made during the election campaign, promises that are now being repudiated, promises of public funds spent to the tune of about half a billion dollars which are now being repudiated. We have heard the promises of the government, and we know they are not to be relied on, Mr. Speaker. It promised us a new and better bill to help veterans. This is now being hinted at across the House, and we are being asked to accept that promise.

As an example of the broken promises offered by this government let me draw your attention to the conditions in the veterans' hospital in Victoria where many of my constituents go for treatment. This is the hospital where they used to get the treatment they deserved, but where now they are treated with something just bordering on contempt. They are a nuisance in that hospital now, whereas once they commanded respect. Under this government the veterans' hospital in Victoria was handed over to the province a month ago, with catastrophic and disastrous results. I should like to put some detail on the record which reached me on Monday of this week as the result of experiences at the hospital over the past weekend.

● (1520)

The staff, which had been under the jurisdiction of the Department of Veterans Affairs, was given the option of alternative employment or early retirement. Those who decided to stay on have been offered alternative employment. In fact this means that former administrators are being asked to perform tasks which, compared to their former employment, can only be considered demeaning. Instead of helping in the administration of that hospital they are now being asked to carry messages from building