

*Veterans Affairs*

We would like to make some comments concerning your stand in support of the decision to phase out the Veterans' Land Act as of March 31, 1974. As you are well aware, all the veterans' organizations in Canada are opposed to a deadline, or any other form of limitation being applied to a veteran's eligibility for benefits under the Veterans' Land Act.

We refer specifically to the statements you made in the House of Commons on November 6, 1973 in answer to the address given by Mr. Jack Marshall, M.P. In your answer to Mr. Marshall you alleged that some veterans were attempting to take advantage of more than one of the three forms of rehabilitation which they were entitled to after honourable discharge from the Armed Forces at the end of World War II. We would like to point out here that there were many veterans who were not aware of the Veterans' Land Act or the university training program until after they had used up all their re-establishment credits. And, of course, they had to refund their re-establishment credits before they could become eligible for Veterans' Land Act benefits. So they were not trying to take advantage of two forms of rehabilitation, they were merely changing one for the other after they had learned of the existence of Veterans' Land Act.

I can say that here is one who, at that time after the war, was not aware of the Veterans' Land Act. I was a city boy. I attended university. It was only after I had been in university for some time that I became aware of this program, not that I would have availed myself of it but I heard of it only at that time. I recall this very graphically. The letter further states:

There is another point that has not been brought out recently as far as we know and that is the scarcity of housing that existed immediately following the end of World War II. This is why many veterans were unable to find suitable properties which could be financed through the Veterans Land Act at that time. Veterans and their families were forced to rent two or three rooms in someone else's house, or buy a place they did not want just to have a place to live. And then, when the housing shortage started to ease, the prices went up to the point where the monies available under the Veterans' Land Act were inadequate to meet the inflationary costs.

I wonder whether anybody remembers the inflation of 1952-53. There was an increase of 13 points in one year. At that time it was necessary to make changes in the Veterans' Land Act to increase the mortgage ceiling and the valuation of property. This is not the first time a government under Liberal leadership has seen galloping inflation and has had to react to it, but perhaps the reaction was a little more prompt in those days than it is now. The letter continues:

And this is why they were unable to take advantage of the Veterans' Land Act later on. So you can see that the veteran was caught in a giant squeeze-play, first from the one side by the housing shortage, and then from the other side by rising costs, and then the game is called in the third quarter because the timekeeper wants to go home early. The solution to this problem is to keep the Veterans' Land Act in operation and to bring it up to date with changing conditions and rising costs.

Perhaps I might interpolate here that that is precisely what the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall), the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), myself and many others in this House have tried to impress upon the ministry. That is the purpose of this motion. I realize there are others of my colleagues in this House who wish to speak, and therefore I shall end my remarks briefly after quoting further from this letter:

You stated that many qualified veterans still serving in the Armed Forces are already established under the Act and that others are in the process of doing so. You say 'many', not 'all'. How about the remainder, and what percent of the total do they constitute? How can a man stationed in West Germany or the Middle East go about finding suitable property in Alberta or Ontario?

I will ask the minister that question. He failed to answer it. When I finish my speech he can answer. How can a man who has given notice, who is presently posted away from Canada, as many men are, make a selection of property, and how can he complete the necessary documents in order to meet the deadlines and the tables laid down in the act? The minister can give the answer. Hopefully there is one.

**Mr. MacDonald (Cardigan):** Sure there is.

**Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West):** I continue reading from the letter:

You say that you are satisfied that the vast majority of veterans who hold Veterans' Land Act qualification certificates simply took the precaution of obtaining such a certificate before the deadline of October 31, 1968. This is just like the precaution they took in 1914, and again in 1939, to ensure that no enemy soldier set foot on Canadian soil, except as a prisoner of war. However, they were not so cautious with their own personal safety a lot of the time.

● (1730)

Finally, in connection with the investment of \$1.25 billion of public funds, there has been a great deal of money made in interest, and the value of this investment must have at least tripled by this time. With the interest rates as they are now, and the properties as security, what better way is there to invest public funds? We believe that the public would be well satisfied to know that their money is invested in this way.

I should like to underline Mr. Heesaker's remarks. This country invested millions and millions of dollars in the free education of its veterans. How did this pay in dividends? This brought uncounted hundreds and hundreds of per cent in profit to the nation. It invested millions and millions of dollars in veterans' housing, farms and so forth. This was paid back. We are not asking the minister to provide any more money in grants. This is not to be a government expenditure. This is to advance more moneys for mortgages which are to be repaid. We ask for more faith in the remainder of veterans who would be entitled to benefits under the VLA.

The letter goes on to read:

In view of the above facts, we believe that a veteran should be eligible for benefits under the Veterans' Land Act until the day he dies. He offered his life in a time of crisis and this is little enough to give him in return and at the same time you are investing public money in a very profitable venture.

On many occasions I have put my views on record on this, and all I can say is that yesterday I told the minister in connection with Bill C-4 that, although it contained many good things, I was bitterly disappointed at what it failed to contain, and doubly more disappointed at the reason why. This was done for fiscal reasons, not administrative reasons. Hell's bells, this government wastes more money in one day than it would cost for a whole year to carry out the program that we call for in Bill C-4.

I am bitterly disappointed that this minister—and he is a veteran entitled to the respect of every member of the House—has had to disclose to the House and to the veterans of Canada, who would be entitled to benefits under VLA, that this administration has closed the door. I think this is a crying shame.

**Mr. Robert McCleave (Halifax-East Hants):** Sir, although this is my first speech in the thirtieth parliament