Veterans Land Act

legislation which this parliament is about to adopt is strictly because of the pressures put upon the government by the opposition.

(2150)

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, in rising to participate on third reading may I say I hope very few members of the House feel the same way as the previous speaker. It is a fact that this legislation has been handled very badly, and this because of the lack of initiative that has been taken and because the committee was not seized of the matter during the period when the committee had very important legislation before it arising out of the Woods commission report. Although this is no excuse, I think it would be unfair to members of parliament if the political discussion that has taken place is again introduced when further legislation is presented.

I am pleased that the minister, no doubt reluctantly—not because of personal reluctance but obviously because the decision had been made, minority government being what it is—has made this change to the legislation. However, I do not wish to echo the observation that the change has come about as a result of political expediency.

Mr. Thomas (Moncton): What else?

Mr. Peters: The hon. member says, "What else?". That may be a good question but I think the fact is that this extension was brought about because of—

Mr. Thomas (Moncton): Political expediency.

Mr. Peters: —manipulation and manoeuvering, and a lot of effort on the part of a number of hon. members. I do not consider the work done by the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall), the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) and a number of other members to have been motivated entirely by politics, but rather by the expediency of a situation that presented itself.

To ensure that this does not happen again and that veterans' legislation is not changed in this way from now on, I strongly urge the minister to give full consideration to how far the government can go in making the required changes to the act, and that he do it through the normal legislative process, namely, by introducing the changes, referring them to the committee and hearing representations from the various veterans' organizations. These changes should be dealt with before the legislation enters the political arena where 20 members or so discuss it in a partisan way. That has not been the practice in my experience over the years. It was not the way changes were brought about in the veterans' charter.

I hope we do not start projecting changes of this kind into the political arena. It seems to me that if this is the case, then in the end the veterans will be poorly done by. Rather, we should in full conscience, after discussion and deliberation, make such changes in the normal way. I have not consulted the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, but I hope that his amendment to the bill today does not have to be used, though I am sure it will be. The only way that it will not be used is if the government comes forward with an acceptable proposition which it

puts before the veterans affairs committee and that proposition receives the sort of discussion it should receive in that committee

There are other matters I could deal with, Mr. Speaker. Personnally, I do not want to see legislation relating to prisoners of war brought before the House in the manner of this piece of legislation. But with a minority government this can happen, and if it does I am sure the legislation will pass. However, this is not the way we have operated in this House in matters relating to veterans affairs, and I strongly hope it will not become the way in which we make changes in this field.

I hope the minister will seriously consider just how far he can go, and will weigh the merit of the various proposals put forward by hon. members during this debate. I trust he will refer these and several other subjects that he knows are important to veterans' organizations in the country to the standing committee, where they can be deliberated free from pressures that are applied in the political arena.

As a veteran, may I say I am proud of the legislation we have developed over the years. But it is never so good that it cannot be made better. I suggest that members of parliament who wish to do as much as possible on behalf of the nation to repay the veterans for the service they have given should make generous and effective provision for our veterans, and in a non-partisan way, as has been our custom. To bring this about we will have to depend on the minister bringing forth legislation that will eliminate some of the immediate problems veterans in Canada today are beginning to face.

Motion agreed to and bill read the third time and passed.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Bell: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, could I have confirmation of the business for tomorrow, since we have made such excellent progress tonight?

Mr. Reid: Mr. Speaker, we will be taking the competition bill tomorrow.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): And if we finish it?

Mr. Reid: If we finish it, we will have a choice between the CNR financing bill and the parks bill.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[English]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.