

Veterans Affairs

In 1917 before Vimy Ridge, Sir Robert Borden, then prime minister of Canada, assured Canadian troops:

'The government and the country will consider it their first duty to see that a proper appreciation of your effort and of your courage is brought to the notice of your people at home, and it will always be our endeavor to so guide the attitude of public opinion that the country will support the government to prove to the returned men its just and due appreciation of the inestimable value of the services rendered to the country and empire, and that no man, whether he goes back or whether he remains in Flanders, will have just cause to reproach the government for having broken faith with the men who won and the men who died.'

But how easily we, as Canadians, forget. Our changing society has brought us to a point where, now, our veterans are treated with somewhat less than the consideration they deserve. And while we take our affluence for granted, we also fail, in our complacency, to realize just why we have become a great nation.

Canada has been involved in three wars—and in each, men volunteered, served and died to protect this country. We remember these men on November 11 each year. But we are failing, in the process, to give just consideration to the thousands of men who served and who returned. We choose, instead, to treat these men apathetically.

It might be more convenient for the government to phase out the Veterans' Land Act. But its elimination will destroy a principle of justice and commitment that will only serve to dilute those things we hold dear as Canadians.

Phasing out the Veterans' Land Act is a breach of faith that will deny a great majority of the 140,000 certified veterans their right to compensation for services to this country.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs says it will cost \$50 million to continue to administer the act. The figure is ambiguous because he is using it to reflect loans which come back to the government at the rate of \$26 million per year.

The Veterans' Land Administration, comprising approximately 400 to 500 public servants, will be employed to administer the act until at least 1980 and probably many years beyond that. In contrast to the minister's statements, administrative costs are approximately \$7 million a year. Continuation of the act will likely require another \$1 million a year.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs says that many veterans are failing to take advantage of the act, but he has chosen to camouflage the real reason why. The fact is that under the present regulations, a veteran must purchase a one-half acre lot, in some cases less 20 per cent, but can borrow only \$15,400 to meet the cost.

Today's skyrocketing housing and land costs prohibit most eligible veterans from meeting these requirements, and therefore, from taking advantage of the act. And, as a further injustice, the Veterans' Land Act has not been altered to meet inflationary demands even though improvements have been made, in this regard, to the National Housing Act and special housing programs for minority groups are improved from time to time.

The government also uses the argument that in 1965 parliament amended section 31 to restrict certification and qualification. But the government fails to perceive that parliament's passage of the amendment might have been wrong—which it was, in my opinion.

If justice is going to be served, the Veterans' Land Act must be preserved with the following amendments:

Repeal of section 31 of the VLA which set deadlines of October 31, 1968, and March 31, 1975, for certification and borrowing.

An increased mortgage loan ceiling from \$18,000 to \$35,000.

A reduced lot requirement from one-half acre to that size commensurate with the requirements of the municipality in which the veteran decides to purchase.

A revised downpayment from the present \$2,600 to 5 per cent of the loan, as available under some present National Housing Act requirements. Freedom for the veteran to choose the type of housing best suited to his needs, such as, perhaps, a mobile home, or a condominium at a locale of his choice.

Authorization of a survey in all parts of Canada to determine the standard of housing of those veterans on fixed incomes.

Introduction of a program to provide rehabilitation grants, with forgiveness factors, to allow veterans to bring their homes to a reasonable standard of comfort.

Since I had this article published my priorities have changed, because I find across the country that many veterans of fixed incomes such as the War Veterans Allowance, disability pensions, and so on, who are living in their own homes cannot afford, at today's cost, to fix up their homes in order to make them reasonably comfortable. I want to thank the newspapers which published that article, even the Vancouver *Sun* which called me Jack Smith. I might say the response was overwhelming, and it pleases me that even at this late date our news media recognize the importance of some 900,000 veterans besides the additional million or so widows and children. Sometimes I become frustrated over the lack of attention shown by the press to veterans affairs in the House and in the committee proceedings. An exception to this is the Canadian Press, which I thank sincerely.

Let me give the minister and his government some food for thought. I shall quote from some of the representations I have received and which, in many cases, he has received as a result of this message. I shall skip the first representation because the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre referred to it. That was the representation from the Canadian Corps Association. There is another organization which presented a representation, the Federation of British Canadian Veterans of Canada. I shall not read the preamble. That association states:

1. The Veterans' Land Act should be extended indefinitely.
2. The Limits of Veterans' Land Act mortgages should be increased to 90 (ninety) per cent of the full property value.
3. That the qualifications date for the Veterans' Land Act should be reopened for an indefinite period.
4. The benefits of this act should be made available to all members of the permanent force, domiciled in Canada prior to enlistment.

That representation is dated October 21, 1974. All of us who say that this act has outlived its usefulness, and that no one is interested in it, should think again. Another representation from the Royal Canadian Legion states that at the twenty-fifth dominion convention held in St. John's, Newfoundland, June 2 to June 6 this year, the following resolution was passed:

Therefore be it resolved that legislation be enacted—(1) to provide for the reopening of the October 31, 1968, deadline for one year, to enable those who missed the earlier deadline to qualify—

They refer to the establishment of the act and also to the fact that it should cover those qualifying veterans who are still serving in the armed forces, and that they should be granted one year after discharge in which to make settlement arrangements. They refer to extending the deadline to December 31, 1978. In their representation, they also ask that loans under part III of the act be increased and that the statutory ceiling on the Veterans' Land Act fund imposed under section 6(4) of the act be removed or substantially increased. They say that their resolution was sponsored by branches in all ten provinces, which indicates the great interest within the Royal Canadian Legion in this important matter. That refers to 410,000 legionnaires. Let me refer now to a few individual letters. I have before me a letter which reads:

I would like to draw to your attention the fact that among those now to be denied the benefits of the Veterans' Land Act are the serving