

Veterans Affairs

who have just come back from a war and are endeavouring to re-establish in civilian life. We have a different kind of veteran today. Our veterans today are looking to retirement, and their needs and wants are different. Surely we have to come up with new ideas rather than continually extending old acts that have long since served their purpose.

I have no hesitation whatsoever in voting against this particular motion. Nor will I be ashamed to go back to the veterans in my riding and indicate to them, as I am doing publicly here in this House, that I am against this motion because the act has done the job it was set up to do. Let us now get on with some new legislation. For the reasons I have stated I am voting against this particular motion, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, like the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) I was somewhat astounded when the younger member for York East (Mr. Collenette), possibly not knowing what went on in this House last session, drew his own conclusions to support purely partisan arguments. He obviously does not know the contents of my file on this subject, which I might add goes back as far as two of the minister's predecessors, that is, prior to the expiry date of 1968.

Contrary to what the hon. member for Sarnia-Lambton (Mr. Cullen) suggests, I have a whole raft of letters from veterans who will be cut off by the phasing out of the Veterans' Land Act at this time. I think it is pure politics on the part of hon. members to suggest that because we want to see this extension we are, in some way, denying the validity or the worth of the legislation in the past. This is an argument bereft of any strength and is made merely to take up time and to confuse the issue. I invite any hon. member who has a large serving garrison in his riding, as I have in Edmonton, to counter that statement.

Let me remind hon. members of the many thousands of veterans who, instead of opting for a civilian life back in 1946 and 1947, stayed in our armed forces. Many others perhaps rejoined in 1952 because of the Korean conflict. These men also have an entitlement.

There is one point I do not seem to have been able to get across to the minister, his predecessor or the hon. member for Sarnia-Lambton. Regardless of what these veterans decided to do at the end of the last war, there is nothing we in this House should do to deny them the rights they earned through service to their country in time of war. Should a right be denied them because they decided to remain in the armed services?

Hon. members should keep in mind that the last 10 years of service in the armed forces must be taken into consideration in any decision by a veteran to settle in this place or in that place because of the various requirements of the act. Under the Veterans' Land Act a veteran must be present during the construction of a Veterans Land Act house. Sometimes I think the officials of the CMHC and the officials of the VLA work at cross-purposes.

I know that officials of the Department of National Defence have expressed a great deal of concern about the difficulties servicemen are having in trying to fit into VLA programs at this time. This concern was caused by the 1968 abridgement and by the refusal to grant an

[Mr. Cullen.]

extension beyond 1974. Now again it is caused by this government through the person of its minister slamming the door on this type of legislation which is in fact housing legislation.

● (1720)

Somehow or other there is an insistence that this is some sort of agricultural settlement. Within the city limits of any major city we have had VLA settlements. They were not any agricultural settlements by any stretch of the imagination. The requirements have been reduced over a period of time. In the case of a disabled veteran, depending upon his disability, the size of a lot could be reduced even more. It is nonsense to suggest that this is agricultural legislation. The problem is housing.

I might bring the minister back to the situation after the war, because some of the other members might not be aware of it. At that time thousands of veterans coming back were seeking housing. I remember reading in the newspapers at that time the ads of people who were looking for an apartment or any type of housing in the city of Edmonton.

At that time housing was provided through the university, through the city and the province, in veterans' quarters. That was one type of housing. There was another type of housing assistance known as wartime housing, with the financial arrangement that that involved, and there was the VLA.

Somebody hit on the idea that some of the men might not like to settle in the big cities but would prefer to settle in some of the smaller towns where they could perhaps have a small holding on the side. This was an idea that was current at that time. It was popular with many men. However, the main purpose was to house veterans rather than to make small-time farmers of them. The purpose was to provide housing when there was a shortage of housing.

What have we today? We have a shortage of housing. When our servicemen come out on retirement pensions, regardless of their rank, we tell them they have rights under the VLA. We tell them there is a maximum mortgage under Parts I and II of \$18,000. One does not have to go to the centre of Toronto or Ottawa to see what the price is for a three-bedroom house. All one need do is go to St. Albert outside the city of Edmonton, within a few miles of the Canadian forces base. One will find that there it is necessary to make a down payment of \$20,000. It is ridiculous to think that a retiring serviceman would have that kind of money to put down on a house.

The government must accept the responsibility for inflation. If there is a point where inflation hits doubly, it is right here. I have received letters in which the men tell me that they have found homes but the cost is out of their reach. I have the letters here if anyone wishes to see them. I could read them into the record. I could also read, particularly for the benefit of the hon. member for Sarnia-Lambton, the comments of the President of the Canadian Corps Association on this point. For the benefit of some hon. members I believe I should place this on the record. The letter is addressed to the minister and is dated January 28, 1974. It states: