

Veterans Affairs

the act"—that section which set the deadline of October 31, 1968, as the termination date for veterans who wish to qualify, and March 31, 1974, as the deadline for applications for those who were qualified and which through Bill C-17 was extended to March 31, 1975.

As it would have turned out, acceptance of that motion would have opened up the fact indefinitely and would not have necessitated this debate today, about which I am sure the government is not happy in any case. Little did I realize at the time just how much effect that motion could have had on the parliament of the day. Strategically, if it had been passed it would have defeated the government earlier and no doubt the historical events which have followed might have been different.

My main purpose, however, in having the motion presented was that I was sure the expiration of the deadline for the Veterans' Land Act was wrong, and I was confident it would have been supported by every member who sat here at that time. I am just as sure at this very moment that it would be wrong to phase out the act by March 31, 1975, and I will be just as sure when that time comes that it will be wrong, unless of course we can find a means of having the act further extended. It is not only wrong but, as I have said many times before, approval by this parliament for setting the deadline in 1965 was wrong, because by so doing the veteran citizen of Canada was denied a right. We broke a faith which had been given to veterans, and reneged on a commitment made to veterans by the government of the day and parliament. So it is with the greatest respect to those who sit here today, and who sat in the parliament in 1965, that I say we have all voted on many things that may be found to be wrong when time passes.

The government opposite uses the excuse, time and time again, that this parliament accepted the decision to set these deadlines, but there have been many laws passed by this parliament over the years that have been amended time and time again to meet changing conditions. We need go no further, in giving examples of changes in legislation, than the Veterans' Land Act itself. It was passed in 1942 with an original ceiling of \$4,800. This was progressively increased to \$40,000 for full-time farmers and \$18,000 for small family farmers, commercial fishermen and smallholders. The repayment period has been extended from time to time to the present 30 years.

Even after 1959, when a time limit of 15 years was set after September 30, 1947, or after the veteran was discharged from the armed forces, the new Bill C-80 in 1962 was introduced to extend the date to October 31, 1968. Then in 1965, by Bill C-128, the additional section was introduced establishing the terminal dates I mentioned previously. Nor do we need go any further than the present Bill C-4 to amend the war veterans' allowances and civilian war pensions. This measure has been amended at least half a dozen times since I have been here, which indicates that the government realizes the need for change as a result of inflation and as a result of representation from veterans' groups and members of this House.

The bill which we passed for second reading is an excellent one and the government has been commended for it. Furthermore, Canada can be proud of it. So why is there a big hang-up in admitting that parliament was

[Mr. Marshall.]

wrong in setting the terminal dates in 1965? Is it a crime to admit that you were wrong? Just think of the commendation the government would receive across the country if it were to extend and improve the measure as we are suggesting. Before I wander too far afield I should like to get back to this motion. I think it is important to point out a very significant feature; that is, that regardless of what happens, members of parliament in opposition can effect changes in the direction of government legislation if they feel it is in the best interests of the people they represent.

In the last year we were able to force, through our rules and procedures, an extension of one year to the Veterans' Land Act. The amendment subsequently introduced by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre gave us the opportunity to demand this debate, and the government, even in its majority position, and inasmuch as it did not want it, had to accept it. In this regard, Mr. Speaker, you are to be commended for your decision to allow the debate. At least this gives us some hope for our democratic process. Perhaps after some sincere thought on the part of the government we will succeed in correcting a grave error, made some nine years ago, by bringing in amendments to the present bill to improve the inequities which exist, or by bringing in a new bill in respect of housing to meet the needs of our veterans.

The acceptance of this motion will not hurt anyone, let alone the government. All we are asking is that the minister review the bill and the expiry date. This will give him an opportunity to consult with veterans' organizations and, hopefully, he will agree that the matter should be referred to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, where we can call witnesses to get their views and thoughts on the subject. Although 15 days does not give much time for review, I am sure the minister has given enough consideration to the many questions we have asked him over the past couple of years. As a result, in reply to the majority of questions I have asked his only answer has been that he has the matter under consideration.

If I might digress for a moment, down in the maritime provinces, in Prince Edward Island, Cape Breton and Nova Scotia, there are so many MacDonalds with the same first name that they have to give them nicknames to distinguish one from another. In view of the number of times the minister has said that my questions were under consideration, I think they should call him Dan "consideration" MacDonald. I think the minister has received enough representations in the past month and has done enough considering himself to make a decision now. But in case this is not so, let me give him some of the representations that have been made to me. In my responsibility for veterans affairs on behalf of my party, I published an article in most of the newspapers in Canada. Although much of it might be repetitive, I use my prerogative to record the article in *Hansard* because it places in context how we feel about the government's direction to phase out the act. I quote from the article as it appeared in the *Ottawa Citizen*:

● (1620)

The government's recent decision to phase out the Veterans' Land Act by March, 1975, can only be regarded as a serious breach of a commitment made many years ago to Canada's veterans.