

mission sat for many months studying this problem and made certain recommendations that no Liberal government, at least in my experience, would have accepted, and I presume no Conservative government would either.

I therefore congratulate this Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) for accepting many of these recommendations, which have made the last years of many veterans much better. I think the reason these changes were made was that it was very easy for each party to put partisanship aside, and together make a decision that was fully in keeping with the needs and aspirations of our veterans, and indeed in keeping with our responsibility to them.

This has been a bad day for the veteran, Mr. Speaker. It has been a bad day for two reasons. First, I attended a meeting of the veterans affairs committee and heard the minister tell the veterans that he was not interested, or rather, to be fair, not that he was not interested, but that he did not believe it would be possible for him to extend the provisions of the act to those veterans who were not able to return to Canada after the first world war and stay for one year.

These people are now over 72 years of age. If you were 16 in 1918 you are 72 now, so we really are not talking about very many people. The minister said he did not think he could anticipate acceptance by his colleagues of an extension of the legislation to benefit those veterans who did not return to Canada for the specified 365 days. There are also several other minor amendments which the minister did not think he would be able to sell to his colleagues, and I suggest this may be because we now have a majority parliament, not a minority parliament.

I did not necessarily expect the minister to extend the date of this legislation, but I did think he would say to us that, although the legislation had to die, he was going to substitute a different type of legislation that would extend an advantage to a veteran and enable him to buy a retirement home with a grant of more liberal amount and, with a much smaller land requirement. But this was not the case.

The minister today sounded more like ministers of governments that I have heard over the years. This Minister of Veterans Affairs—and I say sincerely—has shown a rather unique willingness to examine propositions that have been put before him. Perhaps sometimes he has been slightly naive regarding the implications of such proposals when looked at in a positive way. But in saying today that the time had come to eliminate this kind of legislation, that if veterans are going to re-establish themselves they would have done so a long time ago, he reminded me very much of another minister of veterans affairs who spent a considerable time telling us that veterans' hospitals need no longer exist because there were not enough people to operate those hospitals, and that we should start giving them away so as to get better treatment for our veterans.

Most of the veterans I have talked to who have visited these institutions, which have been taken over by universities and other agencies, have not found that to be the case. The veterans' hospital was a unique institution. Quite often it was run by people who had served in the services, people who were dedicated to veterans' organizations, and who provided the type of service to veterans

Veterans Affairs

that may have been somewhat lacking in normal hospitals. This care improved their morale and gave them a better environment during the last years of their existence. I do not think the change we made in the hospital structure for veterans was advantageous.

If the minister is saying that those veterans who have not taken advantage of the Veterans' Land Act and small-holdings legislation should now come under the National Housing Act, I think he is being unfair if he is suggesting that this is to their advantage. Changes could have been made to VLA and probably would have been made. There really was no point in retaining the four-tenths of an acre stipulation, and perhaps we should have adopted the normal size acre in Parry Sound or New Liskeard, or wherever it might be. The lot might be 33 feet wide by 100 feet long, or 50 feet wide by 150 feet long, all depending on the practice of the community in which it is located. In any event, some fluidity should be adopted in that regard with relation to the vicinity or the community in which a person lived. This might not be of any advantage to veterans living outside organized communities, but perhaps that is what we should have done.

● (1720)

One fact that is not generally known to members of this House who have not been concerned with veterans over a period of time is that when veterans' legislation was established the money was put into a number of veterans' funds for use under the land act, and by various agencies regarding re-establishment credits and other things. In each case when those funds were returned they were not returned to the agency that provided the money but to the treasury. That means that a great deal of money goes to the treasury in this way.

Had we originally established a revolving fund under veterans' legislation the minister would now be looking after a sizeable account, and perhaps more consideration would be given to the reinvestment of that money for the benefit of veterans. Because this money goes back into the general account of the nation the amount does not appear to be very large. The return on VLA loans is very large but the output would be relatively small, and perhaps we should do something about the interest rate.

In the legislation we are considering there was another consideration not followed in respect of the National Housing Act. I refer to the restriction placed on veterans because of the advantage they were receiving over those who had to deal on the general commercial market. That restriction was that a veteran had to live in the house built under the Veterans' Land Act for a period, I believe, of at least 10 years before being entitled to full benefits.

Perhaps the government should have followed this practice in respect of national housing, and retained title in all properties for a 10-year period. This would have prevented speculation by individuals who built housing under government legislation. I agree that there might have to be some trade-off because of conditions of mobility which exist in respect of the majority of young people today resulting from job changes, transfers and the like. We would have to provide some flexibility in respect of that 10 year period to cover these changes in jobs, moves and transfers.