

Veterans Land Act

ment of Canada and also in the affections of the people of Canada. The veterans of Canada make up a group which has earned special concessions. We would not be sitting here tonight, Canada would not have survived as a nation, if they had not been willing to make the supreme sacrifice in defence of their country, in defence of a way of life they thought was worthy of the ultimate sacrifice.

● (2130)

I make this point because this is the first time I have seen any government take a niggardly attitude to the veterans' charter. I have been a member of this House for a number of years and have seen many ministers of veterans affairs. The government is niggardly, not only in its present attitude to the extension of benefits to veterans under the Veterans Land Act but we face the same problems with veterans pensions. There is an enormous backlog of pension applications. Such applications require a year or more to process. Meanwhile, veterans are getting older and their problems are intensifying. Veterans' cases which come to my attention show that the veteran is becoming increasingly unhappy and dissatisfied with the service he is getting from the government. I know this because more individual veteran's cases are coming to my attention now than have come to my attention at any time during my service in the House of Commons. I am sure other members will bear witness to the same situation in their dealings with the problems of their constituents.

The need for extending the Veterans Land Act and all its benefits in their various manifestations has been demonstrated both in the debate today and in the earlier debate in a way that is crystal clear. There is a housing crisis in Canada. The cost of a lot, a mortgage and all the other things which are involved in putting a roof over one's head is prohibitive. It is much greater than anyone could have anticipated as recently as five years ago. It is obvious that the amendment placed before us this evening in the form of Bill C-17 will not begin to meet this problem.

I will not recite in detail what needs to be done. Obviously, the ceiling is inadequate. The size of holdings should be changed to make them compatible with the regulations of Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Many veterans did not qualify for benefits because of the cut-off date in 1968; they did not benefit because of a chain of circumstances, including the inordinate rise in the cost of living in Canada which no one could anticipate. Many veterans will suffer by being cut off from their benefits, and this will happen in the declining years of their lives.

Unfortunately, because of the disastrous limitations of the bill veterans will be forced into panic buying, panic action which will confound their problems rather than ameliorate them. There is one slight ray of hope. I wish to devote a few minutes to the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. I know that the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe would like to present a similar motion, so there is no difficulty from the Conservative side of the House. I think the minister himself will be persuaded that in the circumstances, in light of the criticism which has been directed against him because he is responsible for administering the Department of Veterans Affairs, he ought to support the amendment. The amendment provides an option for

[Mr. Dinsdale.]

the government in the dilemma in which it finds itself: it will give an opportunity to members of parliament, at a specified time in the future, to deal with the limitations encompassed in the actions of the government.

I trust that the minister will be able to persuade his colleagues to think along such lines, although it is obvious that he does not enjoy enthusiastic support in his endeavours on behalf of veterans. I hope he can persuade his colleagues to go this far, to at least keep the option open so that we can discuss the limitations of the government's proposals at a future time. I would go even further and say that in light of the government's attitude on this matter and many others, it is hardly likely that after the next election it will be charged with the responsibility of looking after the welfare of veterans. Making sure that veterans get their just desserts, which are being denied by this administration, would be made much easier if the government kept open the option which is provided by the amendment now before parliament.

My final point, Mr. Chairman—not to belabour the point—is that I hope the minister and his colleagues will support the amendment so that at least they can make some semblance of saving face in this situation.

Mr. MacDonald (Cardigan): Mr. Chairman, I have listened to some very worth-while suggestions. I should like to answer all the questions asked, but first may I deal with those raised by the hon. member for Edmonton West. He asked about the extension. My answer to him is that the extension from March 31, 1974, to March 31, 1975, applies to new establishment loan applications. The deadline for disbursing new loans is extended to March 31, 1976. As far as the extension from the March 31, 1977, deadline is concerned, the deadline relates to additional loan applications from veterans already settled or who will be settled by March 31, 1975. There seems no need to extend the deadline for veterans already established.

I wish to refer to a few other matters. The hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe elaborated quite freely on the disservice being afforded veterans because they are forgotten by the veterans' charter. I would not like to have that impression left in this House or in the country, because our veterans have some of the best legislation in the world.

● (2140)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacDonald (Cardigan): I shall not take up too much time, but I want to mention a few of our achievements in the past year. The disability pension was increased last year by 24 per cent. In the past fiscal year this government gave, upon request, an additional \$54 million. We were very happy to do that. The war veterans allowance was also increased in midstream. This amounted to another \$17 million. I may be off by a few million dollars here or there because I am quoting from memory. Travelling allowances were also increased. To say that our veterans are forgotten and our charter does not recognize them any more is a very unreliable statement. The lodging allowance was increased for veterans who find it necessary to go from their area to be examined by doctors or specialists of one kind or another.