

Veterans Affairs

of this House that entitlement to a piece of this land ought to be the right of any veteran". So I hope the minister will look at these other provisions to which I have referred, as well as the cut-off date.

If the Minister of Veterans Affairs has an alternative, if he is going to come in with a veterans' housing program that is equal to what we are asking for under the Veterans' Land Act or even better, then I will applaud him to the skies. In fact, I dared to hope that the 15 days' notice that we had to give of this motion and this debate might even have given him time to upstage this debate, and I wondered day after day whether he was going to stand up on motions and announce a veterans' housing program. If he gets up today and makes this announcement, the debate will not take two days; it will end almost momentarily. But if he is not prepared to do that, this House, as I say, will have to continue to debate the motion and the debate may become a struggle on the part of some of us to persuade all members of the House to back the minister, even if it is backing him against his cabinet colleagues, by voting unanimously for the motion and asking the minister to undertake the review that is asked for in the motion.

When the question of the Veterans' Land Act comes up, there are those who argue that its purposes have changed, that the veterans knew the law regarding the October 31 date, and so on. But there are veterans who feel that these arguments do not hold water at all. I should like once more to quote a few sentences from a letter written to the minister on January 28 of this year by Mr. E. F. Heesaker, dominion president of the Canadian Corps Association. The letter had to do with the extending of the March 31, 1974, deadline, but Your Honour and others will see immediately that it refers to the question on a long-run basis. These are some of the sentences in Mr. Heesaker's letter:

We would like to point out here that there were many veterans who were not aware of the Veterans' Land Act or the university training program until after they had used up all their re-establishment credits. And, of course, they had to refund their re-establishment credits before they could become eligible for Veterans' Land Act benefits. So they were not trying to take advantage of two forms of rehabilitation, they were merely changing one for the other after they had learned of the existence of the Veterans' Land Act.

That, of course, is in response to a statement that on occasion the minister has made, to the effect that some of these veterans were trying to get more benefits than they were supposed to obtain. Later in his letter Mr. Heesaker has this to say:

You say that you are satisfied that the vast majority of veterans who hold Veterans' Land Act qualification certificates simply took the precaution of obtaining such a certificate before the deadline of October 31, 1968.

Then, says Mr. Heesaker:

This is just like the precaution they took in 1914, and again in 1939, to ensure that no enemy soldiers set foot on Canadian soil, except as a prisoner of war. However, they were not so cautious with their own personal safety.

There are just two more sentences in Mr. Heesaker's letter to the minister that I wish to read; they express the view of most of us in this House:

In view of the above facts, we believe that a veteran should be eligible for benefits under the Veterans' Land Act until the day he dies. He offered his life in a time of crisis and this is little enough to give him in return.

I have already said that getting the deadline extended from March 31, 1974, to March 31, 1975, was an accomplishment of the twenty-ninth parliament. There should be no deadline at all on any veteran's right to assistance from this country to enable him to get a piece of land on which to have a home, even if it is only for the purpose of having a home in which to retire. If that is going to be realized, then we must do something about the October 31, 1968, cut-off date for obtaining qualification certificates. We also must do something about the amount of the loan, as well as about the size of the lot it is permissible to obtain under the Veterans' Land Act.

In my view, this is a very important issue. I am proud of the fact that this unusual procedure of our having a debate because a statute of parliament says we can have it happens to be on this subject, a matter of concern for the veterans of this land. I think it is significant that we are having this debate on the days just before Remembrance Day when most members of the House are wearing Remembrance Day poppies. I hope we will, in the course of this debate and by our decision on the motion, take a stand for the rights of our veterans that will support the Minister of Veterans Affairs in his battle inside the cabinet in attempting to do what these veterans are seeking. On their behalf, we seek either an extension of the Veterans' Land Act or a veterans' housing policy that will give those who served Canada the rights they have earned, the rights they really deserve.

• (1610)

Mr. Jack Marshall (Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, since I have been here, when we have had questions on veterans affairs I have had the privilege of speaking before my friend, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). I am pleased to follow him now, and I commend him for his keen knowledge of the rules which brought about this debate on the motion we are considering today and shall be tomorrow. I am pleased to follow him because he allowed me to collaborate with him in seconding the motion he filed a few days ago. I am also pleased that the proposal has reached this stage—this was brought about and alluded to by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre—as a result of a non-confidence motion I introduced on behalf of my party on March 12 during the last session, a motion which had the effect of extending the expiry date of the Veterans' Land Act for one year. I know I am going to be repetitive, as I agree wholeheartedly with the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, but I think we must perhaps, during this one last opportunity we will have, repeat and repeat the need to correct a wrong.

The motion today is a very simple one which merely asks that the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) review the terminal date and report back to the House within 15 days of the date the motion is approved by the House, with or without amendment. There should be no problem in having this motion accepted. I appeal to all members of the House, particularly those opposite, to support the motion. Having had the opportunity of reflecting on the events which have followed since last March, if I could have the opportunity again, my motion would then have read "that the government should repeal section 31 of