

Veterans Affairs

again. We must retain our veterans' legislation just in case we have not seen the last of world war. If the act is not amended to extend the time and widen its provisions we will certainly be taking a step backward instead of a step forward.

● (2140)

[Translation]

Mr. Prosper Boulanger (Mercier): Mr. Speaker, as many other members in this House, I must say that it is an honour for me to rise in this debate on the motion introduced by our distinguished colleague, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). When one addresses this House on veterans' affairs, there is no doubt that it is a very moving subject, and there is no doubt either that we can often let ourselves be carried away by our emotions and forget the facts.

It is not because a few of us here are veterans that we have necessarily reached the peak of perfection in terms of veterans legislation. One thing is sure, when one is both a veteran and a member of parliament, one is first of all proud to be able to say that we now have a minister who is probably, in addition to his qualifications as a minister, one of our greatest, most deserving and most dedicated veterans of World War II. We owe him special tribute, particularly for the work he has done and the dedication he has shown since his appointment to this high office.

We have only to listen to you to realize that you all have at heart the interest and the well-being of veterans of World War I and II. None of us wishes anything else than the good of our veterans and certainly I am one of those. It is a most moving subject which we could discuss for several hours.

As those who talked before me, on November 11, Remembrance Day, I too will attend the parade, as I have done every year and not only since I have been elected to Parliament. I have done so for a long time, as a member of the Canadian Legion, as a member of the Canadian Armed Forces, I will do my duty as a member of parliament, just as anybody else, and especially as a former member of the Royal Canadian Air Force.

That does not mean that when there is a decision to be made, only feelings are taken into account until the last minute and that we cannot be a little more realistic at a given time.

I listened to many members talking most sincerely as did the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall). No hon. member in this House has any doubt about his sincerity and dedication towards the veterans of Canada. None of us entertain any doubt about the other members who talked tonight.

Now, I am chairman, and I am proud of it, of the standing committee of Veterans Affairs. I am trifling a little saying that I will now speak French because when I chair the committee I speak English so that I will get done more quickly. I know that I could also speak French and so feel more at ease. But I use English to better co-operate.

Today, we succeeded in tackling Bill C-4. It must not be forgotten that the third report of the standing committee has been tabled in the House at two o'clock, this afternoon, and all the committee members certainly deserve con-

[Mr. Jones.]

gratulations for their achievement. It will be always possible to improve the Veterans Affairs Department Act and especially the Veterans Land Act. I am quite ready to agree that there are pros and cons and that pros are 100 per cent commendable. The arguments against, at this time, the arguments of those who want to retain the present legislation and that the deadline be extended to March 1975 find much less support. That is for sure! But I know that some members opposite have said that the minister might not exert the influence he should in the cabinet. I do not entirely agree with that.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) does not look like a man who is ready to give up or to answer the veterans' problem with a flat refusal in the last remaining days. I am not disclosing any secret since I am not in the confidence of the cabinet or the minister. Apparently, the minister as any good veteran has a trump card hidden somewhere which will enable us once the legislation is phased out to carry on our work through a new formula and a new procedure which will perhaps assist a great number of veterans who have not yet taken advantage of that legislation.

I would like to quote statistics like all the others. I suppose that in such a debate we are likely to repeat ourselves. In the first place, we cannot refer to no other legislation than this one. Even what I have to say would compel me to quote some documents, some figures and some dates. I should honestly admit that it has been said already three or four times by some government members. I have never heard any member opposite say so. Nevertheless, one aspect of these figures strikes me. A previous speaker said that the laws have been amended and upgraded from the year following the war. Then a date came where we witnessed something extraordinary. In 1959, Parliament approved the cut-off date of September 30, 1962. I remind my distinguished colleague, the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall), of this fact.

In 1959, the cut-off date of September 30, 1962 was approved. If we recall, this government was not in power at that time. The opposition members are trying to tell us what to do. It seems to me that at that time, they had every opportunity to do what they are asking for today, under more difficult conditions. At that time, the issue was the eligibility to benefits under the Veterans Land Act. In 1962, we were not yet in power, let us not forget it, this cut-off date was extended to October 30, 1968.

● (2150)

We were then on the Opposition side of the House and we agreed with the government's proposals. The Act was amended to this effect in 1967 and 1968. The new cut-off date received a great deal of publicity. We will recall the many debates on this subject, the publicity made in newspapers as well as in all information sent to the Canadian Legion.

In view of the rehabilitation factor of the post-war years, people said that Parliament had approved the new cut-off date in 1965 in order to eliminate in a fair and methodical manner the loans granted under the Veterans' Land Act. It is on March 31, 1974, that the cut-off date was set to enable the veterans to get a loan for the purchase of