

Veterans Affairs

consist of two ministers. That is of some interest, I am sure.

The veterans charter was something on which we all worked. I have not looked up *Hansard*, since, but I recall the hours and days that we spent. Many of those were veterans of the first great war, for few of the second great war had yet returned.

In the last days of that legislation the three Ministers of Defence mentioned the contribution made by Her Majesty's loyal opposition and of various amendments, and I say this in all modesty, that they were advanced by myself.

Why this haste to get rid of this legislation? What is the reason? It certainly cannot be in the heart of the gallant Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald). Indeed, as he listens to the debates, he makes very clear the fact that he is doing a job he does not want to do because he invariably keeps his eyes down on the documents before him.

Mr. MacDonald (Cardigan): Come on, John. I am busy.

Mr. Diefenbaker: It is true. I have watched the minister with interest. I have great admiration for his tremendous service in the days of war. He has a job to do.

Why do these members of the government want to get rid of this legislation? They talk of politics. Somebody mentioned there should be no politics in connection with veterans affairs, and that is right. Those sitting opposite should be their own physicians in that regard.

Before the election the government postponed action, along the lines suggested by the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall) and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). Their plea was accepted, and action was put off until after the election. There were no politics, of course, activating any member of the government in postponing this legislation; they were filled with a desire to help the veteran. I heard about it in my own constituency. People said: "Isn't it wonderful how the government listened to the arguments of the opposition and has postponed action on terminating the Veterans' Land Act?"

● (1550)

Now the election is over, a majority has been attained, and this motion is being talked out. It is being talked down and opposed by the very members who were giving it their utmost support during the period between 1972 and 1974. What is the haste here? As pointed out by the hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich (Mr. Munro), the government has promised that sooner or later, at some time, other legislation will be introduced. I say the government should postpone consideration of this motion and bring in that legislation now. I ask the government whether it has that legislation ready, or is it in cold storage? Have the bills been drawn? I wait for an answer, but the minister is silent. The answer is no.

I ask the government not to play politics with this matter. Do not endeavour to deceive the veterans of Canada into thinking that somewhere, some place, some time, the government is going to introduce something that will be even more beneficial to them than VLA. I say, produce it now and let it be seen.

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

Is it for economic reasons that this legislation is being ended? Again there is a deep silence from the government benches. The government is going to save money from this. Is that the purpose? The government profligately spends the people's money, yet to save a few dollars it is going to take money from the veterans, many of whom are today beginning to realize that they ought to have taken advantage of the Veterans' Land Act. Surely the government will reconsider its decision.

A few days hence we will stand on Parliament Hill and do honour to those who gave their all. A few days in advance of this day of national remembrance and dedication we have before parliament a motion asking for a review of the terminal date of the Veterans' Land Act. But the government sits silent, in expectation of something about to be achieved.

I do not want to go into a lot of detail, but I make an appeal on behalf of those who are asking that this legislation be not set aside until the government has an opportunity of deciding whether the legislation should be repealed. We talk of justice being done to our veterans, and much has been done in this regard. But just as important as that justice be done is that justice appear to be done.

In this case all I can say is that, as one who has a badge which I treasure above all others—a 50 year active membership badge in the Royal Canadian Legion—I appeal to the government to reconsider. Think for a moment what its action means. I ask it to adjourn this debate until the new legislation is brought in. Do not ask this House to vote for something evanescent, for something promised by a government which, with the greatest respect, has not been noted up until the present time for carrying out its promises, its responsibilities and its undertakings.

Mr. William Knowles (Norfolk-Haldimand): Mr. Speaker, I consider it a privilege to participate in this debate following the profound remarks of the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker). I do not expect to emulate his oratorical skill, but I do want to assure hon. members that I am as sincere in what I say as he and others members on this side are regarding this motion.

It is unnecessary for me to detail the events that led up to this debate; that has been done by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) and the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall), whose strategy and procedural work in bringing this debate before the House today are recognized by members on all sides of the House. Indeed, we are deeply indebted to them for this opportunity to draw the attention of the minister once again to our absolute opposition to the abandonment of the Veterans' Land Act. Through the procedural work of these members we have obtained at least a one-year delay.

It is interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that the signatures which were required to move this motion all come from members on this side of the House, and this despite the fact that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre endeavoured to interest members of the Veterans Affairs Committee who sit on the other side of the House in affixing their names in order that the matter might