

Veterans Affairs

Mr. Paproski: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I point out that the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. Holt) is in the chamber with a recorder. I think it should be removed from the chamber.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I think the point is well taken. I am sure the hon. member will accede to our practice, which is against objects such as that being introduced in this chamber.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I was about to say that our redistribution legislation provides that there are times when we must debate certain matters in this House. That statute requires us to do so. Indeed, there are other statutes which provide for a similar kind of debate. But this could well be the first time debate has actually arisen as a result of the written request of the required number of members.

The amendment under which we are operating today, which was written into the Veterans' Land Act amending bill of last session, provides that if at any time after September 30, 1974, 20 or more members request that the cut-off provisions of the Veterans' Land Act be reviewed, the House shall have the right to debate a motion, asking the Minister of Veterans Affairs to review the cut-off date of March 31, 1975, which is now in that legislation. Accordingly, there was presented to Mr. Speaker on October 17 a motion in line with that provision in the act, signed by 25 members of this House. Those 25 members happen to be members of the three opposition parties. I took the responsibility for getting signatures and I sought the signatures of a number of Liberal members, but for one reason or another they did not wish to put their names on the document. I hope that in the debate today Liberal members will participate as well as members of opposition parties and will indicate to the minister their strong desire that the Veterans' Land Act shall not die on March 31, 1975.

Let me go back to another bit of recent history. There is a long history behind the Veterans' Land Act and I suspect that my colleague, the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall), who seconded this motion, will recite some of the earlier history and some of the promises made in years gone by. But I should like to remind hon. members of the House of a few things that happened within the last year. In the latter part of 1973 it became obvious that many veterans were disturbed because the Veterans' Land Act would expire on March 31, 1974. Many questions were asked of the Minister of Veterans Affairs in the House of Commons. His answers always reflected his genuine sympathy for the veterans of Canada: There is no gainsaying that. Still, his answer as to whether the Veterans' Land Act would be extended beyond March 31, 1974 was always "No".

A year ago this week, on Friday, November 9, 1973, we had one of those rare occasions when a motion presented under Standing Order 43 was allowed: there was unanimous consent for it. It was a motion of mine, again seconded by my hon. friend who is seconding my motion today, the distinguished and gallant member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe. The motion, as recorded at page 7693 of *Hansard* for November 9, 1973, reads as follows:

That this House requests that the Minister of Veterans Affairs give urgent consideration to the amending of the Veterans' Land Act regulations to permit veterans to acquire smallholdings, even if the main purpose of most of the older veterans now applying for loans under the Veterans' Land Act is to meet their housing requirements, it being the view of this House that entitlement to a piece of this land ought to be the right of any veteran.

Hansard then records:

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

I recollect that that "Hear, hear" was expressed in generous applause. Motions under Standing Order 43 are usually denied. The Speaker made sure of its acceptance before he put it: he asked twice if there was unanimous consent. There was no opposition. Then *Hansard* records the following:

MR. SPEAKER: I believe there is unanimous consent. Therefore I will put the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

● (1550)

That was the action of the House of Commons on Friday, November 9, 1973, at which time we said unanimously to the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) that we wanted the Veterans' Land Act to be continued and, in particular, that we wanted consideration to be given to veterans making application for loans under the act even though the main purpose was to meet their housing requirements.

In the weeks that followed, we earnestly hoped that favourable action would be taken in response to this unanimous request by the House of Commons, but the questions which were put to the minister from time to time did not elicit a hopeful response. On January 11, 1974, the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe sought to put a motion under Standing Order 26. Permission was denied. He then put a question to the minister asking whether the view of the House expressed on November 9 would be acted upon. The minister's reply, while courteous and sympathetic was, nevertheless, quite clear—the Veterans' Land Act would not be continued beyond March 31, 1974.

Members who were in the last parliament will remember vividly—I certainly do—developments in the month of March. On Tuesday, March 12, my hon. friend from Newfoundland moved a non-confidence motion on this issue. That motion really put things into a tizzy around here. The motion said things with which practically every member of the House agreed. At the same time, it raised the question whether there would be an election over the issue—whether the government would be defeated, in which event the Veterans' Land Act would not, in any case, be extended beyond March 31, 1974. We in this party made it clear that we agreed with the words used in the motion, and that if the government refused to do anything about the issue we would vote in such a way as to bring the government down; but that if the government were prepared to bring in the necessary legislation to extend the Veterans' Land Act, we would vote in such a way as to keep the government here so that extension could be implemented. During the course of the debate on March 12,