

Veterans Land Act

probably be three or four such amendments if we could do it. But if my amendment carries and becomes part of the law, it would not by itself produce any change in the original act; and even if the device proposed in my amendment is pursued, that would not by itself produce a change in the original act.

All the amendment does is to provide a means and a guarantee that this House of Commons, if 20 members so wish, will discuss a motion, some time after September 30, 1974, asking the Minister of Veterans Affairs to review the cut-off date that will be enacted by this bill.

● (2110)

My amendment does not go behind this bill at all. It does not deal with the other matters in the Veterans Land Act that need revision. I have no doubt that in the two-day debate that takes place next fall there will be reference to those other matters, but so far as the amendment is concerned it does not seek to amend the Veterans Land Act itself. It does not seek to go behind the amending bill to the main bill. It simply provides an opportunity for a two-day debate in the fall, and in that respect it is patterned after what this House did by way of a precedent last year when we provided for a debate under the Income Tax Act with respect to corporate tax reductions.

I submit, Mr. Chairman, that none of the arguments advanced by the hon. member opposite touched this proposal at all. I submit that the amendment is neatly based on the precedent of the Minister of Finance, that it does not involve the expenditure of money, that it does not negate what the bill proposes, that it does not seek to go beyond the bill to amend the act, and that all it does is to make sure that there will be a two-day debate this fall on the question of the cut-off date. I believe that the amendment is in order.

The Chairman: If hon. members have completed their submissions, the Chair is prepared to make a ruling. First, I would like to thank those who took part in the discussion on the point of order. I would refer members of the committee to the explanatory note which accompanies Bill C-17, as follows:

The purpose of this bill is to extend from March 31, 1974, to March 31, 1975, the final date for acceptance by the Director, the Veterans Land Act, of applications for sales, advances, loans and grants under parts I, II and III—

The recommendation accompanying the bill, which is to be found on page 3 of today's notice paper, reads:

His Excellency the Governor General recommends to the House of Commons a measure to amend the Veterans Land Act to extend from March 31, 1974, to March 31, 1975, the final date for acceptance by the Director, the Veterans Land Act, of applications for sales, advances, loans and grants—

The question that the Chair must determine is whether the amendment presented by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is relevant to the principle that was determined on second reading, that is, whether his amendment is within the scope of the bill as determined by the House on second reading. I think, from the two quotations I have given, first from the explanatory note and secondly from the recommendation, that what we agreed to in principle was an extension of a particular section of the Veterans Land Act for one year. The amendment suggest-

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

ed does not extend the extension. It does provide a method of review by the minister. It does not order the minister to extend the deadline again. It does not tell him to take any specific action which would involve the expenditure of moneys, and indeed it could not, because if it did it would be clearly out of order on that particular ground.

If the minister were to follow the direction in the amendment and decide to extend the act further, he would have to come to parliament, armed as he is today with the royal recommendation, and nobody can take that particular right away from him.

I have to find that the amendment as suggested by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is relevant. It is within the scope of what was determined by the House earlier today upon second reading. However, perhaps in the interests of parliamentary grammar I will make the following changes in the first three lines of the hon. member's amendment:

That clause 1 of Bill C-17 be amended by adding thereto, immediately after line 25 on page 1, the following subclause—

This is simply a parliamentary nicety, using the word "clause" instead of "section." Apart from that, I find that the amendment is clearly in order.

Mr. McKinnon: Mr. Chairman, I do not intend to speak at great length. I do not intend to try to decipher some of the convolutions of the argument about the legality of the amendments. I would like to say a few words about the Veterans Land Act. It is a pleasure to speak on this legislation. I am thankful for the opportunity and I suppose all hon. members are thankful for it because we very nearly did not get it. This bill will give us all an opportunity to regroup our forces.

I have some doubt about the amendment that has just been accepted by the Chair in that it will cause the question of the extension of the VLA to be brought back to this House for debate if 20 members so signify their intention. I am no longer certain that this House is the best place to debate the matter. I think that our record over the last few months on this subject indicates the House is not able to express the wishes of the majority of its members.

I have yet to hear a voice raised in this House wishing the act to die on March 31, and yet it came within a few NDP votes of so doing. It seems to me a negation of democracy when the rank and file of the official opposition, of the other opposition parties, and particularly the rank and file of the government party—those who have nothing between themselves and the voters but their own records—were very much in favour of extending the act, yet someone on the government side did not want it extended.

I respect the Minister of Veterans Affairs. The impression I have formed of him is that he has the interests of veterans at heart. I believe that he left the veterans affairs committee several times to take ideas and proposals that were favourable to veterans to the cabinet, and was turned down. It is probably the least well kept secret of this House and of the government that he has had a very difficult time during the last three or four months, and only through being saved by a Conservative resolution was he able at the last minute to extend the act. I am glad