

Veterans Affairs

who went overseas to fight in the defence of freedom... I wish to assure honourable members as well as my comrades across this country that this government intends to continue to live up to its commitments to all veterans.

I remind the House that he was referring to the provisions of the Veterans' Land Act. Yet a mere seven months after that statement the same minister, speaking on the same issue, told the House yesterday that the original purpose of the act has been amply fulfilled.

Earlier today the hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore (Mr. Robinson) said that this legislation has outlived its usefulness. Surely we do not look at legislation from that point of view. A law does not outlive its usefulness. Law is not static. It is something which lives and breathes and continues to change in a way which reflects the social and economic needs of the day, as this piece of legislation ought to do. It is not enough for the minister to say that the original purpose of this act has been amply fulfilled, and then dismiss it from his mind. This law should be adapted to meet the needs of the day.

What puzzles me, Madam Speaker, and many others, is this: what prompted the government's change in attitude with regard to the Veterans' Land Act in the short space of seven months? Cynics will point to the recent election results, with justification, as the determining factor in changing the government's position. Let me say that the government's approach, its changed position, reminds me of litmus paper. The government was true blue when it was in a minority position, because then it felt pressure and had to react. But now it is true red; it has a majority and seems to think it can do as it pleases.

If the minister is considering proposals to assist our veterans obtain decent housing, as he indicated yesterday, it seems to me that it is even more important for him to accept the motion now before us, which asks him to review the terminal date of the Veterans' Land Act and to make a further statement within the next two weeks on what the government intends to do in this area. Then he could provide more definite information on any proposed new program. He could also give notice to all serving personnel in this country that the government will not break faith with them and that the present act will remain in force until a more equitable, contemporary housing program for veterans can be introduced.

Mr. D. M. Collenette (York East): Madam Speaker, it is with considerable trepidation that I enter this debate. I was flattered when my colleagues asked me to contribute. Many in this House had the honor to serve their country in the armed forces during the war. Others of us were of too tender an age to be eligible for service; but we enjoyed the luxury of being defended by those gallant troops without ever having to don uniforms ourselves. Indeed I was but a wartime twinkle in my father's eye.

I suppose it can be said, rightly, that only those who endured in that struggle can understand the nature and extent of the sacrifice entailed by leaving families and homes, and answering the call to combat in the service of country, particularly in a war which initially was not of our own making. They heeded the summons to defend our allies, which probably made the sacrifice even more acute. With this in mind I take part in this debate. I defer to those who actually saw service, and have always been

[Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands).]

conscious of having grown up free of fear and danger because of the tremendous sacrifice made by those who answered the call.

Although I was born immediately after the end of world war II, I grew up in war torn England and can remember, when I was five and six, my home neighbourhood being ruins, our block of flats being the only one standing. We amused ourselves in those days by playing on bomb sites. I also remember that many of my classmates did not have fathers. I remember every family conversation being laced with references to the war, and many times I heard of the sad loss of members of our family. Actually, eight members perished at one time in an air raid. I mention this only to show that my generation has been made aware of the great sacrifice that our parents and grandparents were forced to make so that we, in my generation, could stand here today.

I was somewhat puzzled by the remarks of the hon. member for Broadview (Mr. Gilbert), who talked about members on my side of the House lacking compassion. Let me tell the hon. member that some of us on this side have vivid memories of what the war was all about, even though we did not fight in it. I trust hon. members will bear this in mind.

Why am I taking part in this debate? Consider the motion before us. It has been presented not long after our eight-day debate on the Speech from the Throne, during which the opposition had any number of opportunities to discuss any subject. Indeed the minister participated in that debate. The question raised by this motion could have been raised at that time, especially as the minister had stated he was studying this matter. Bear in mind, also, Madam Speaker, that the estimates of the department were before the committee of the whole about two weeks ago.

I submit that there is not a member opposite who believes the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) has not been giving this matter serious consideration every day and that he will not continue to do so. Is it seriously contended that the effect of this motion, if passed, will be this: that the minister will begin to review this question? What is the real reason behind this motion? Is it real concern for veterans, a genuine concern for their well-being?

Nobody doubts the sincerity of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall), and the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), as well as many others on both sides of the House who have spoken on this issue. No one questions the sympathetic views expressed on behalf of our veterans. But, please, do not question the sincerity of members on the government side.

● (1650)

I take extreme exception to the remarks of the hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich (Mr. Munro) who said this is a further example of how the government rides roughshod over parliament. I believe the opposition is wrong in insisting on flogging this issue to death and misleading the general public.