

Supply—Veterans Affairs

Mr. Quelch: There is one other point I should like to raise. At the time this act was first under consideration, many members urged that the merchant marine should be brought under the act. At that time, the Minister of Veterans Affairs pointed out that at the conclusion of hostilities there would be a shortage of seamen and, therefore, the department did not want to encourage them to leave the sea and go on the land. The minister stated quite definitely, however, that a few years after the war it might be possible to widen the scope of the act to include merchant seamen. I was wondering whether or not that question is now under consideration. I understand there are quite a few seamen looking for work, and no doubt they would like to have the opportunity of coming under this act.

Mr. Gregg: Mr. Chairman, I am speaking now from memory, but I cannot recall any demand on the part of merchant seamen, or anybody on their behalf, for this particular benefit. There was a request for vocational training, and that, to some degree at least, has been fulfilled. I am assured by my deputy minister that he has not had, and I certainly have not had many inquiries for the benefits of the Veterans Land Act.

Mr. Green: I presume that is because the seamen know they are ineligible.

Mr. Quelch: That is the reason. The seamen know they are not eligible now, but certainly many representations were made by members of the committee asking that they be included. If the minister feels there will be very few anxious to take advantage of it, then the government would have very much less responsibility and I would think the government would be more willing to bring them under it.

Mr. Brooks: In that connection, I might state that the Canadian merchant navy representatives appeared before the veterans affairs committee, and the following is a report of their request:

Mr. Chairman, we ask your committee to recommend to parliament that the veterans of the merchant navy be given the benefits of one, the vocational and educational grants; two, Veterans Land Act; three, rehabilitation grants; four, housing legislation; five, civil service preference.

I know that the merchant marine did make a very special request for the benefits of the Veterans Land Act, and I think that they made the request not only at this particular meeting of the veterans affairs committee but at a number of other committee meetings which I attended.

Mr. Gregg: That is true, as part of the background of the request that the merchant seamen be treated in all respects as ex-members of the armed forces.

Mr. Harkness: I should like the minister to clarify the situation in regard to mineral rights on lands taken up under the Soldier Settlement Act. The minister will remember that not long after he took over the department I saw him in connection with this matter and he succeeded in straightening it out very well. I should like to take this opportunity to thank him for that. Regulations had been in effect for many years which prevented a veteran who had taken up land under the Soldier Settlement Act from obtaining the mineral rights to that land. Those regulations were changed later enabling him to get those rights.

During the past few months, I have had complaints from two men in connection with the fees charged them in order to secure those rights, and the difficulties they had in connection with them. One man apparently had to pay two fees. In this man's case, the land had been in the family before. It had belonged to his father and the veteran had purchased it from some member of the family under the Soldier Settlement Act. This man lost the opportunity to sell his mineral rights or lease them during the oil boom in the Turner valley. He now has to pay these two fees, and as a result feels rather annoyed. Could the minister explain what these fees are and what the necessity for them is?

Mr. Gregg: Mr. Chairman, I thank the hon. member for his remarks. As the matter stands now we are in a position where we are able to return to the veteran, under the old soldier settlement board, all the mineral rights if the director of the soldier settlement board was in possession of those rights. I believe that is working out well in so far as it possibly can work. The fee charged was \$25 to cover the cost of searching and drawing up documents—that sort of thing.

Mr. Harkness: For what was the second fee charged?

Mr. Gregg: I do not know of any second fee.

Mr. Harkness: Just on that point, could the minister tell us how many soldier settlers did obtain their mineral rights?

Mr. Gregg: I have not the figures here but I will get them for the hon. member.

Mr. Murray (Cariboo): I should like to ask the minister if the rights of the soldier settlers at Montney in the Peace river country in British Columbia are being protected with respect to the oil rights on the land which has been taken over from the Indian reserve? There are 38 settlers in the neighbourhood of Fort St. John who have been very profitably settled on the land. The land having been