

Soldier Settlement Act

gentleman would tell him how it could be done by means of this measure. However, I will try to make it plain in my own simple way.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): I am not talking to the hon. member for Athabaska, I am talking to the right hon. leader of the opposition just now.

Mr. MEIGHEN: Well, I will try my prentice hand at it, but in this category I am very much like the minister himself. The minister proposes that there will be committees appointed here, there and everywhere to revalue the land. First of all, though, he proposes that before the committee operates he himself, through his representative, and the soldier will sit down and decide what the soldier is going to get by way of subtractions from his liability. Was ever such power given a minister in the world's history? Why the minister by that act is simply handed, I would suggest, thirty or forty million dollars of the credit of Canada, of cash if you wish to call it that, and he is given a free hand to distribute that as he likes, as may best suit his advantage or party advantage among the soldier settlers of this Dominion. That is really what it amounts to, there is no restriction put on him at all. There are 17,000 settlers to use that money and it will be distributed where it will do the most good, and the minister can put his own interpretation on the meaning of the word "good." That is what the minister could do under this legislation. He will not dispute it. Does my hon. friend suggest to me that such is not the case?

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): I beg my right hon. friend's pardon. The minister would dispute it.

Mr. MEIGHEN: He could not.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): However, you are making your speech; go ahead.

Mr. MEIGHEN: The minister will not dispute it, not in any reasoned speech. The soldier settler claims a reduction, and the minister could give him \$100, \$1,000, or \$5,000 if he owes that much.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): The minister cannot do anything of the kind.

Mr. MEIGHEN: The minister's representative can.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): Oh, well, that is different.

[Mr. Meighen.]

Mr. MEIGHEN: Well it was always the same in my time.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): I must confess my right hon. friend had more power over the people he appointed that I ever had.

Mr. MEIGHEN: The representative cannot do it without the minister's authority. The minister chooses the representative. He appoints him, he dismisses him, he does what he likes with him—the representative is his agent. But if it comports more with the minister's sense of propriety to say that he can do through his agent what he cannot do with his own hands I have no objection to the euphemism, none whatever. This money is placed in his hands. Seventeen thousand voters with seventeen thousand wives, and I know not how many children, are all there. The minister, through his agent, spreads the forty millions round and I do not think he will find it very hard to reach his objective. It is a different thing when a minister is given power to buy land which he must sell at the time he pays to the soldier. He has no incentive whatever there to do anything save to get the lowest price for that soldier. There is nothing on earth he can gain there. But here he has got everything to gain by being lavish to the soldier. In the one case he could not possibly misapply or abuse the power given in relation to the purchase. In this case he could misapply and abuse to his heart's content.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): Is my right hon. friend still thinking of the minister?

Mr. MEIGHEN: I absolved the minister in point of intention at the first.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): My right hon. friend appointed this board in the first place. I have never changed them.

Mr. MEIGHEN: I know that.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): Will my right hon. friend just let me read for a moment what it is proposed to do:

The minister may appoint district arbitration committees having jurisdiction in such soldier settlement districts as may be necessary, each committee to consist of three members, one of whom shall be an official of the Soldier Settlement Board, and one a representative of the Veterans organization in the district.

Mr. MEIGHEN: Yes.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): That is the distinction.

Mr. MEIGHEN: I have not got to that point yet, but it will be bad enough when I get there. I am now at the preliminary stage.