

Soldier Settlers

it that he felt that it was not—I was going to say any reflection—on those who were still in difficulty, but that would be too strong a word. I do not take that position myself, but I do not believe, as the hon. member for Selkirk suggested, that all those men who remain under indebtedness have been the victim either of their service or their circumstances, any more than I believe that all those who already have had advantage of these various reductions were always entirely deserving.

Really it is too late to look into that aspect of it; it is too late to make an issue of whether the late director of the soldier settlement board was a saint or an angel. It is almost bad form to think of him in relation to this particular type of legislation, and certainly I was surprised that any hon. member should claim any credit for the fact that he has been translated to another sphere in the public service. That is not an issue which is germane to this matter.

We have a problem. About a year ago we had 862 people who owed roughly \$950,000. As the result of the administration of a fund of \$175,000 last year we have been able to reduce these numbers by 262. I did not subtract the figures, but the figures used a moment ago show a balance outstanding of less than \$600,000. Taking into account the figures which my hon. friend has given, this probably means that in about two years' time, at that rate, we shall have removed the problem, and we shall not have established a precedent of saying that if you are stubborn enough and you live long enough, even though you make a contract with the government you will not have to pay.

I am not suggesting that a single one of these remaining men is taking that attitude. There have been instances of men who did. I do not know of any at the present time. I am not suggesting that, but I do suggest that there is a principle which has to be recognized; there is a contract. Under these conditions I do suggest it is unfair to say that any injustice has been done to them as individuals as compared with all of the other 25,000 who have succeeded or who have passed out of the picture, having striven and failed.

I am particularly and peculiarly aware of the fact that we have here a great new field of contracts with the veterans of world war II. We shall have more shortly. I am not unmindful of the importance of the way in which this or any other government succeeds in winding up the soldier settlement board scheme. I feel sympathetic. I am as sympathetic to the objects of the hon. gentleman as I was when I stood up in my place in

the house and voted on the first occasion, with some personal embarrassment.

Being as close to the administration of the department as I am, I am convinced from what I have seen that what we are doing is not working the type of hardship upon these people which has been indicated tonight by some of my hon. friends. I believe that we are accomplishing our objective in an orderly, businesslike manner, and in a way which is not likely to prejudice the contracts which will exist in the future or give rise to hard feelings on the part of those who made the necessary little bit of extra struggle or had the necessary little bit of extra luck to fulfil their contract at the full price.

There is no one, I am informed, who is in dire necessity as a result of his indebtedness to us who is not given consideration, who is not assisted in many instances either partially or by outright payments. I submit, sir, that this approach to the problem, with which I have had some association and which has been received so well by most of those who have profited by it, is as much as the house should ask of the department at this particular time. I submit that it is meeting the situation and will continue to meet it in full whether or not my hon. friend will have an opportunity to come back and make one more appeal for the last time. I suppose that is in the hands of other persons than him and me. If he is elected, I am sure he will make the plea again. If he does and I am speaking with any responsibility at that time, I am quite sure that I shall be able to tell him that the number is reduced again; that the cases of real hardship have been taken care of, and that the people for whom he pleads and for whom he has pleaded for so long—whom I too, in my own way, have tried to serve—are not getting a deal that can be described as unjust, but that they are, among debtors, in a preferred position, and that we are glad it is that way, and have every intention to keep it that way.

Mr. Victor Quelch (Acadia): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make one or two comments on the speech of the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Mutch). He has referred to the fact that many reductions have been made in the past. However, perhaps many hon. members are not aware of the fact that the reductions that were made rarely, if ever, caught up with the accumulation of back interest.

In those early years, in 1919 and 1920, when the soldier settlers first settled on their lands, the costs of those lands and of the equipment were excessive. Unfortunately