

Soldier Settlement Act

tempt to estimate the amount of money it will involve, but we might as well make up our minds to do what is necessary. This is a war loss, there is no mistake about it, and it is not going to be lessened by ignoring it year after year while conditions are steadily growing worse. I would rather see mistakes made and the land undervalued than have the present condition continue indefinitely. This is one of our post-war mistakes, and we are doing neither ourselves nor the soldiers on the land justice when we leave them unassisted to accomplish an impossible task.

One of the difficulties arose from the fact that at the outset a great many people would not believe what they were told about the unsatisfactory condition of our agriculture. Those of us who are farming our own unencumbered lands found during some of those lean years that the balance was on the wrong side of the ledger. I do not mind telling the committee that one year I went behind \$2,000 although I did not owe one dollar upon my farm. How was a soldier settler to get through such a disastrous year when he was further handicapped by having to make payments on his land? It was an impossible task. The reason perhaps that we of the Progressive group were more sympathetic towards our soldier settlers was that we were in a better position than most other members to understand the actual difficulties which confronted those men.

I am sure the minister will be ready to adopt any suggestions to improve the bill which will be based on this resolution, and I appeal to every member of the committee to regard the proposed legislation as at least an attempt to do justice to our soldier settlers by helping to remedy what at the present time I believe is nothing less than a scandal.

Mr. ARTHURS: Mr. Chairman, I was for many years a member of the Pensions committee of this House which had this question in their charge, and I can readily understand the difficulty the minister has in framing a bill which will be satisfactory to all of our returned soldiers who have settled on the land. I would ask him at the next sitting of the House to be prepared to give us a little information along these lines:

First, the total number of soldier settlers in each province.

Second, the number who have paid in full.

Third, the number who are in arrears.

Fourth, the total value of the land occupied at the present time by returned soldiers who will ostensibly come under this measure.

We should also like to know, as the right hon. leader of the opposition has suggested, [Mr. Forke.]

who will properly come under this legislation. The bill itself reads:

The settler. . . who has not repaid his indebtedness to the board,—

I presume that would mean those who have not repaid it in full.

—and where there has been a decrease or depreciation in the market value of such land...

Also the settler apparently must be at present residing on the land. It appears to me that under this resolution a man who owed a few dollars to the board would find himself in the position of having some money coming to him from the government instead of having a further payment to make. Along that line the difficulty which we had in our committee in the past—and it is a difficulty that this or any other government must face—was to do justice to those men who by hard work—as contrasted with the carelessness of those who have failed to keep up their payments—have paid for their land in full. We have thousands of cases, I believe, in every province where two men on exactly similar land, which then and to-day would be valued at exactly the same figure, provide a striking contrast, one having paid in full and the other having paid practically nothing. Is it fair to the man who by his industry and by his thrift or by the assistance of his friends,—which ultimately he must repay—should receive no consideration while the other man, who simply through lack of industry and economy is in arrear with his payments, should be granted a reduction of from 30 to 40 per cent in his indebtedness? This is a question which the government must consider very seriously. It is a question that is receiving a great deal of attention among our returned soldiers.

I think this measure should be considered entirely upon its merits, not from the point of view, as expressed by the leader of our Progressive friends (Mr. Forke), that we should do everything we possibly can for the returned soldier, for in this case it would only lead to benefiting those who have not paid at the expense of those who have.

Mr. SUTHERLAND (South Oxford): Mr. Chairman, I also have been a member of the committee dealing with the pensions and settlement of returned soldiers, since its inception. I have a very distinct recollection at the time when legislation of this character was first brought down of saying that I was afraid many of these soldier settlers would curse the day that they ever accepted a loan to go on the land. I am sorry that my prediction has come true. It is generally admitted to—