

*Soldier Settlement Act*

atives of the board should sit down across a table and endeavour to come to an understanding. As I said just now, officials of the board have realized for some time, I believe, that revaluation of at least some of these properties is an absolute necessity, and I believe that it will be possible to sift out those cases where the settler wishes revaluation and remove a considerable number of non-contentious cases from the list.

When it comes to the second proposition in the resolution, I cannot say that I am pleased with it, for that very reason which has already been mentioned. It matters not what government is in the saddle at the time; there will be the danger of partisanship entering into the provisions of the committee, and I would very much prefer to see a county court judge substituted, as has already been suggested by several hon. members, or in some way brought into the arrangement to be made, because I think the county court judge can reasonably be expected to be free from partisanship.

Mr. MEIGHEN: This is one of the very baffling questions confronting this House, Mr. Chairman. The principle of revaluation after sale is one admitting of application very seldom. The ground advanced here is twofold, as I grasp the debate which took place the other day, and also that of to-day. The first point is that there were certain lands sold by the board—which is by the government—to the settler above the actual value at the time of sale. This is more or less a minor ground for applying the revaluation principle. The major point is that there has been, since the sale, a very marked depreciation in the value of these lands, as of all other lands in the country.

Referring to the first point for a moment, I would not endeavour to contend that in the performance of the enormous task undertaken by the Soldier Settlement Board, that in the administration of its great trust, involving the purchase of some 18,000 farms from one coast to the other and involving the value of lands far beyond this total for purposes of loans other than actual purchases and sales, there were not cases where the soldier paid too much. At the same time I hope I will be pardoned if I emphasize the fact that if ever precautions were taken to fortify the settler against inroads of that kind, they were taken in this great project. The land was valued not only by officers of the board but by independent appraisers, and the land had to be selected by and the price agreed to by the soldier himself. No soldier was permitted to enter who had not had farming experience

[Mr. Stirling.]

which should have qualified him to value the land, or who had not had such training at the expense of the board as would similarly qualify him. I may say that so successfully did these precautions appear to have been that in every year during the time of those purchases, and during every session of parliament, hon. members were invited to lay before the board any case of a purchase and sale above the market value at the time, which had come to their knowledge. Until I left office, which was more than two years after the system was under way, and which was after the expiration of the purchase of almost all the soldier lands, there had not been one single case of a complaint presented by a member of this House on any side which even the member himself claimed to have been established. As a matter of fact I can still recall that members of the House, speaking from their seats, related cases of over-valuation; being subsequently requested in writing by the board to designate the farm and the purchaser, they refused to divulge the information. I may mention as well that in one province—for these circumstances I intimately recall—the board found it impossible to make any extensive purchases of school lands. The House will note that in the original act provision was made for the valuation by an officer of the province affected and by an officer of the board of any school lands requested by soldiers. In the case of the province of Alberta, for the simple reason that the officer of the provincial government absolutely declined to acquiesce in values low enough to meet the views of the representatives of the board, we found it impossible to make any substantial purchases of school lands. I may interpolate here that the then Premier of Alberta was the present Minister of the Interior (Mr. Stewart, Edmonton).

It is true that on the west shore of lake Manitoba we encountered a rascal who attained an office under the board. He subsequently got out of the country, which is the reason he is not serving a term in the penitentiary at the present time. He was largely responsible for purchases made there which certainly were not right, and some of which were nothing less than fraudulent. In addition though to his presence in the organization, we must remember that on the west shore of lake Manitoba there was at the time a very considerable development and optimism, resulting in extensive purchases by private individuals, among whom I will be forgiven if I include myself. Land was purchased then at prices not one-third of which could be realized to-day. The lands have since been simply abandoned, and the private individuals have had