

Soldier Settlers

were credited with the dollar payment. But even with those steps that were taken by the government there still remained a hard core of veterans who, because of no fault of their own—because of sickness in their families, ill health, the fact that they had been settled on poor land, or perhaps that they did not have any farming experience to begin with—were unable to meet their obligations. I do not think it is asking too much of this parliament to ask it to clean up those remaining 548 cases and give those old veterans, who for 34 years have been struggling to pay for their land, clear title to that land.

Mr. William Bryce (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, I should like to support the resolution introduced by the hon. member for Battle River (Mr. Fair) with respect to soldier settlers. I should also like to say that he deserves great praise for his persistence in bringing this matter before the house every year. I am quite sure that he has earned the distinction of being a fighting Irishman, because I think this is the sixteenth or seventeenth different occasion on which he has brought this matter before the house.

I do not rise to support this motion merely because I happen to be an old soldier. I rise as a Canadian, because I want to see justice for these old soldier settlers. The matter of granting clear titles to these men has been brought up for consideration in the veterans affairs committee on many different occasions. The matter has also been raised in the house here. The Canadian Legion has supported it; in fact, the Legion has given it every support. The hon. member for Battle River and other hon. members of the house have put on the record statistics covering the last 30 years. No good purpose would be achieved by my putting those statistics on the record again. According to the remarks of some of the members who have already spoken, these old soldier settlers now owe about half a million dollars; I think the hon. member said the amount was \$572,000.

I can talk from practical experience, having been a settler in this country. When those soldier settlers were buying their farms wheat was \$2.50 a bushel. Everything they bought—whether it was the farm, horses or anything else—was based on \$2.50 wheat. You did not get a particularly good team of horses in those days for \$500. Cows were \$150 apiece. Implements were on a level with those high prices. It is the men who have stuck to the farms, the veterans of the first world war, whom we want to see have some comfort and pleasure after an extremely hard life.

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One could talk about the frozen crops, the drought, etc., but they lived through the thirties, a period which was calamitous not only to soldier settlers struggling for an existence but to all farmers. Like my colleague the hon. member for Melfort (Mr. Wright), I sometimes wonder what the administration costs are in connection with this half million dollars that is now owing. I wonder if it would not be good business for the government to write off that amount. I wonder whether they would not be farther ahead, whether they would not save themselves considerable money by so doing.

Most of these men are now over 60 years of age and should be entitled to every consideration in connection with giving them clear titles. This is not a political matter. In the past hon. members of all parties have supported this resolution. On behalf of these men who rallied to the call of Canada in the years 1914 to 1918, in our hour of need, I appeal to the government even at this late date to give them clear titles and let them hold their heads high for the few remaining years they will be here.

Mr. L. A. Mutch (Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, this is not the first occasion on which it has been necessary, or on which it has been my pleasure and responsibility, to speak on this motion. I need not remind the house—because the hon. member for Battle River never lets the house or me forget it—that on two occasions from my seat in the house I supported the resolution which is now before us, and did so with a vote.

I think perhaps I can show that in recent years I have been able to do something more about it than support it, when I say that during the time I have been associated with the department, under successive ministers, as a matter of policy some \$825,000 has been contributed toward the liquidation of some of these cases of debt in an orderly fashion, by means of an annual grant, on the principle of applying this measure of relief where it was most imperative that it be given and where it was most needed.

I rise now to suggest to the house that this is a proper practice which has been carried out for the last five years, I think it is, and is now projected for another year. I would point out that what has been accomplished has been, year by year, to do in an orderly fashion rather more than to give consideration, which is what the resolution asks for. We have not only given consideration; we have actually liquidated the problem—and to an increasing extent—each year.