

Honourable members will recall the difficult situation the Government were placed in at that particular time in their efforts to do something for the men who were coming back and were seeking to be fitted again into civil life. The fact that the Government at that time were able to find suitable employment for 30,000 of those men and place them, at least temporarily, was of great benefit to the country at large. They had been at the front for a number of years, living under peculiar circumstances and in the midst of turmoil and stress and the tragedy of war. When they came back many of them, no doubt, pictured to themselves the quiet countryside and thought that it would be an ideal change to go on the farm. A large number went on the land who were never suited for agricultural work, and under the circumstances it is not to be wondered at that many of them failed.

It has been pointed out that in the first instance too much was paid for the land and that too high prices were paid for stock and implements. There had been one or two boom years, and prices were in excess of real values.

There is one point that I think has perhaps been lost sight of—the economic value of those men who went on the land. No doubt, placing them there cost a great deal of money, but it must not be forgotten that the produce of those farms added many millions of dollars of new wealth to the country.

This proposition cannot be treated as a purely business affair. It is a psychological problem. As the Minister who came in contact with many of the transactions of the Soldier Settlement Board I may say that I never knew of a case of a soldier being dispossessed that was not followed immediately by a flood of letters from the district protesting against the idea that he and his family should be moved from the land. If a mortgage company or an ordinary farmer had been concerned, nothing would have been heard about it, but as it was the Government, the people wanted these men to be treated in the most liberal manner.

The honourable the leader of the Opposition (Hon. Mr. Willoughby) has mentioned the condition of the agricultural industry at the present time. I am a farmer and know exactly what conditions are. I think that without being egotistical I may say that up to a few years ago I might have been called a very successful farmer. I have been in politics to some extent during the last few years. I am not ashamed to tell this House that during the past year or two the balance from my farm—and it is a large one—has been on

the wrong side of the ledger. I have often remarked to the Chairman of the Soldier Settlement Board: "I do not see how those fellows are going to pay for their farms and carry on under present conditions."

While I quite agree with some of the remarks made by the honourable senator who has objected to this Bill (Hon. Mr. Black), I think the committee that had this matter under consideration in all its details took what might be called a rough-and-ready way of solving the problem. It is a problem that is not easily solved. If agriculture were flourishing and any man who chose could make a success of farming, the problem would not be so difficult, but many of these men have to be nursed along and treated according to their circumstances.

I do not intend to vote against the Bill; I know it has received very careful consideration at the hands of the committee that had it under advisement; but I cannot say that I am entirely satisfied with it. I do not think it is altogether just, or that the action proposed can under any circumstances be defended on the grounds of pure justice. I think a better way would have been to consider each individual case on its merits. That, of course, would necessitate a reliable tribunal to take everything into consideration. The men who are doing their best should receive every encouragement; those who are careless and indifferent should not receive the same treatment.

A good deal has been said about the cost of the administration of the Soldier Settlement Board. Of course the cost of that administration has decreased very much since its inception. At one time it was perhaps double what it is to-day. The staff, I know, was more than double. I do not think it would be possible to do away with the Board or to get along without an administrative board of some kind. It is not necessary that a separate department should be established. The Board has been created by an Act of Parliament that can be changed at any time, and this work might be carried on by a large committee working under another department. At the present time, in a sort of way, it is under the Department of Immigration. It would be quite possible, in connection with some other department, to have an executive board looking after the soldier settlement scheme and the 3,000-family scheme. It would not be necessary to have such a large staff as we have at present. During the three years that I was in office it was my constant endeavour to reduce the Board as far as practicable, but honourable gentlemen who are familiar with governmental departments will