

reservoirs, canals and ditches, in certain areas are now owned and administered by the land owners. But consequent on the development of those water systems, the rebuilding of certain structures which had fallen into disrepair and their proper maintenance, water rates, speaking very generally, were raised from somewhere in the neighbourhood of four and five dollars to eight and ten dollars; and as water is the lifeblood of the land in the irrigation district, and is looked upon as a direct charge on the land, so it had a very definite effect on the capital value of orchard properties. In 1921 followed another big crop at low prices. The optimism which had started in 1919 was already drooping, and in 1922 came an absolute devastation in fruit prices, the bottom dropped out of the market, its effect was severe on the value of orchard property, and in consonance with that the value of mixed farming property dropped a very great deal lower than it was at the time the majority of these purchases were made.

Now, with regard to the view which the soldier settlers themselves in that neighbourhood take of this matter, I should like to direct the attention of the committee to a resolution which was adopted by the soldier settlers in the middle section of the Okanagan valley. The covering letter which accompanied the resolution contains a paragraph which I desire to quote:

That if Major Barnett is accurately reported in recent speeches that abandoned soldier holdings will be given to new immigrants at a price in keeping with present values, and if such is now to be the government's policy, then it is felt that the need for a reduction of original loans of soldiers becomes imperative if the immigrant is not to be more favourably treated than your soldier settlers.

That demonstrates what I consider might be called the frame of mind in which the soldier settlers met together and adopted this resolution. The resolution itself was passed at a meeting of soldier settlers in the Okanagan district of British Columbia on March 10. After referring to the inflation in land values and to the depreciation in their land, stock and equipment to the extent of 50 per cent or more, and to the incoming British government-assisted immigrants, the resolution proceeds:

Therefore be it resolved that this meeting representing the districts of Kelowna, East Kelowna, Rutland, Glenmore, Ellison and the Mission, desires by this resolution urgently to request the Right Hon. Mackenzie King and the parliament of Canada to enact legislation which shall ensure reduction of the soldier settlers' lands to the extent of at least 50 per cent of their original amount.

I am glad to see that there is this further paragraph:

Resolved that this meeting desires to express appreciation to Colonel Johnston, Superintendent, S.S.B., Vernon District, and staff, for their considerate treatment of the soldier settlers during the past difficult period.

I am glad of that expression of appreciation because, as I say, I can only speak with detailed knowledge of the conditions in Yale. My impression for years past has been that the officials in that office have been doing everything that was humanly possible to make the Soldier Settlement Act a success, and to assist soldiers in their efforts.

But the introduction of this entirely new suggestion, that the reduction should be 50 per cent of the original purchase value, I think perhaps may come about from lack of a clear understanding on the part of those soldier settlers of just what revaluation means. Take it for a moment with regard to orchard land. If an orchard is to be maintained, the work you have to do to it is not going to be definitely beneficial in the year in which it is done. The proper way to build up the soil of an orchard is to cover crop and to turn that cover crop in. There is no dollars and cents return to the owner during that year, nor indeed at any time, except in the effect which the increasing of the humus of the soil has on the quantity and quality of the fruit. The same remark applies, to an extent, to pruning, spraying, thinning—all this is work which has to be done if the orchard is to be maintained at a proper degree of excellence to carry the fruit of subsequent years. Now, the soldier settler says, if revaluation is taken on now it may easily develop that the present-day value of that orchard is higher than it was when it was purchased, but yet the purchase was made during a time when land values were inflated, and it still is and always will be an undue burden on that soldier settler so long as he has to make his payments to the board on too high a value. I think in that also if the minister would make a statement that all these matters will be taken into account and that a real investigation will take place as to the sum of money paid in the year of purchase with regard to what that land really was worth, then the soldier settlers of Yale will at least understand the question much more thoroughly than they do at present.

With regard to the details of the resolution on which the bill is to be based, I am inclined to think, again confining my remarks to those parts of which I have knowledge, that there is virtue in the suggestion that in the first place the settler and the represent-