

Soldier Settlement Act

returned soldier myself I should like it made clear that there is no question of their being led by wealthy men or ex-officers.

Mr. McLEAN (Melfort): Before addressing a question to the minister let me say that the hon. member for Comox-Alberni came near the truth in describing the convention—not the legion—in its relation to that resolution. I was amazed at the passing of a resolution of that kind. I asked a senior officer afterwards and he said that it was better to be moderate, not to ask too much; that the government had treated them generously in the past. I happen to know a little about the convention, and it is in line with what the hon. member for Comox-Alberni said.

I would ask the minister whether the bill is to be based on the resolution or if the resolution is merely descriptive of a bill already drafted.

Mr. CRERAR: The resolution is descriptive of the bill drafted. The first step is the drafting of the bill; then the law clerks are supposed to draft the resolution to agree with the terms of the bill. They tell me that has been done in this instance.

Mr. McLEAN (Melfort): I am satisfied with that answer; I think it is correct, although differing somewhat from my idea of what we are doing when we pass a resolution authorizing the introduction of legislation. As a layman perhaps my misunderstanding was excusable, but I thought the bill would be based on the resolution this house passed.

In any case I should like to draw the attention of the minister and the committee to the similarity of language used in the resolution before us to-day and that used in 1936 when similar legislation was before the house. It differs by the addition of three words; that is all I can find. In the present resolution we have the words, "to provide further that the period during which payments of arrears or instalments at present subject to bonus privileges may be made." Two words there, the words "at present," are not found in the resolution of 1936. I am not saying that the inclusion of those words does not change the sense of the resolution, but in my opinion it does not. The resolution of 1936 read:

That it is expedient to amend the Soldier Settlement Act to provide that the period during which payment of arrears or instalments subject to bonus privileges may be made be extended to the 31st day of March, 1938.

To all intents and purposes that resolution is exactly the same as the one now before us, and so I think there is justification for the mistake made by myself and others in thinking it means the same as the resolution of 1936.

[Mr. Green.]

A good deal has been said to-day about the Farmers' Creditors Arrangement Act being open to ex-soldiers. As a matter of fact the legion convention at Fort William recommended that as many as possible take advantage of that machinery. But there are in this country many ex-soldiers, as well as other settlers, who do not want to have anything to do with that piece of legislation, which is based on the dominion's powers to regulate bankruptcy.

Mr. BENNETT: It involves the assumption that the settler is himself insolvent. The act can be applied only if the applicant is insolvent.

Mr. McLEAN (Melfort): Yes, and many settlers do not want to go before a court on that assumption. They want to meet their contracts, but on as favourable terms as others are getting. For that reason I think it is not a good thing that we should speak so much here of their having that machinery available.

In reference to what the minister said about reductions which have been made in the past, it is true that nominally and on paper, and I think actually, parliament and governments from time to time have been quite generous in the treatment of soldiers, once the obligation was incurred. But in the incurring of the obligation governments and parliament in times past have been most unwise in authorizing expenditures.

Someone quoted prices of cattle supplied to these men in the earlier days. I myself saw horses costing as much as \$500 a team sold to settlers who had no feed for them, no work for them to do, no knowledge of horses; the horses knew nothing about the men and the men knew nothing about the horses. The result was that within a few months those horses, fed up for market and sold at a high price, were practically without value. The same is true in regard to cattle and machinery, where the latter was sold to men who had no use for it, no place to store it, and in some cases no cleared land on which to pile it. That kind of thing entailed greatly increased debt for the settlers.

I am not criticizing any administration that was responsible for these things; they were part of many other mistakes. Nevertheless the debts were incurred, and the reductions made in connection with debts incurred for stock and equipment were not enough to put many of the settlers on a sound footing. A reduction was made that applied to all. Later on other reductions were made, culminating in the thirty per cent reduction, I think in 1930. There the committee which dealt with the question of soldier settlers was faced with