

*Prairie Farm Assistance Act*

exclude lands which it had been possible for persons to homestead over a very considerable term of years, or possible for them to secure by purchase or otherwise over a considerable term of years. It was thought that if it had been possible, from some time back in the 1870's or 1880's down to 1940, to secure these lands, and no one had seen fit to take these lands over, then it was quite natural to suppose that they were submarginal lands and not fit for cultivation in the ordinary sense. For that reason, if they were put back in cultivation as a result of action on the part of local governments or even by this government, they should be put back on terms which would not make necessary the payment of prairie farm assistance. That, in general terms, is the provision of the amendment of 1950.

When that matter was before the committee on agriculture it was pointed out by members from the northern parts of the three prairie provinces, and particularly members from the northern sections of Alberta and Saskatchewan—and I should enlarge upon that by saying that the area extends from Saskatchewan over into Manitoba—that there were areas along the northern part which had not been put up for homesteading, had not been available to the public over a period of years, but had been brought under the homesteading provisions or in some other way made available to settlers since 1940. It was said that under the act those lands would be subject to payment of the one per cent on any grain delivered, and because of that they should be made eligible if, as time went along, it was indicated that they were entitled to payments.

As the minister in charge I conducted the bill through the committee. I stated at the time that the government admitted the justice of that claim, but we found it difficult to draw a line without first having some experience. For that reason I suggested that the legislation go through in the terms in which it was submitted to the committee, and afterward to the house; and I gave an undertaking in committee, which I read to the house when the resolution was introduced on November 14. I shall read it again, in order that it may be clearly before hon. members at this time. I said to the committee:

I can give more assurance to my hon. friends.

By that I meant more assurance that day than I could the day before.

Since we met this morning and before the meeting this afternoon, we had a meeting of council and

I discussed this matter with council, and they agreed with what I suggested.

And then in a few words I repeat the suggestion.

They think it should be retroactive in order to make the check that we want to make; and they are also committed to the undertaking I have given to the committee that if we find it is creating hardships which should not be created under the spirit of the act, we shall have amending legislation next year.

That undertaking was given to the committee at the time; and we have had two years' experience since that under the amendment. I just wish to give the committee the result of that experience, in order to show that it is very definitely indicated now that there is an area about which we should legislate.

In 1950, the year the legislation was passed, as a result of the operations of that year it was found that in the Alberta-Peace river bloc, which extends over into British Columbia, there were 1,628 quarter sections that were excluded because of the amendment we made in 1950, where payments otherwise would have been made. In that same area in 1951 there were 3,689 quarter sections. Of those 1,600 may be the same that were excluded in 1950; but it means that there were some 1,600 the first year and 3,689 the second year. In the Edmonton area, part of which is north of township 60—and practically all these quarter sections noted are north of township 60, even in the Edmonton area—in 1950 there were 392 and in 1951 there were 1,954 quarter sections.

Just to indicate the difference as between those areas and the areas with regard to which we were legislating and about which we were attempting to do something, in the Calgary area in the southern part of Alberta in 1950 there were only 87 quarter sections excluded, and in 1951 there were only 112. That plainly indicates that the area north is in a different class and should be treated differently in this regard. In other words, payments should be available to a very considerable number of those people. In order to indicate the Saskatchewan position, where the greater part of the lands are located, in 1950 the number of quarter sections that would be excluded by this section was 56, while in 1951 it was 978. That is, the figure is considerably higher in 1951 than it was in 1950. But when one looks at the map there is not an accumulation of these quarter sections in any one particular section, even in the north, where you could attribute it to the same reasons that can be given for the northern part of Alberta and the Peace river section of British Columbia.