

*Soldier Settlers*

bought them. The hon. member for Battle River also mentioned the price of the stock they had to buy. They paid \$125 or \$150 for a cow which a few years afterwards they had to sell for \$15 or \$20. What was true of their cows was true of their horses and the other stock they purchased.

They also went through what I suppose was the hardest period of years in the life of farmers in Canada. In the period from 1920 to 1939, when the second great war started, there had been two depressions. These men struggled through the bad times. Their case was considered by the government on several occasions during that time, and some improvement was made. In addition, Mr. Speaker, these men were never their own bosses. If they had something to sell they could not, like the ordinary farmer, go out and sell in the best market or sell when they wished to. There was always someone from the soldier settlement department at their elbow who told them when they could or could not sell. I know from the experience of potato farmers in particular in my own province that when the soldier settlement board felt they should pay whatever was due on their farms they were practically compelled to sell their product at the then market price and not wait, as other farmers had the opportunity to do, until prices increased. All these things reacted against these men.

I believe the hon. member for Battle River also spoke about the high interest rate these men had to pay. If he did not do so this year I know he has in the past. For many years these men were charged 5 per cent on the money they had borrowed, and any who did not make their payments were charged 7 per cent. All this indicates the great hardship under which these men operated. I am satisfied that most of them not only paid for their farms but paid for them two and three times over.

There is another matter that we should take into consideration when we are considering the debt we owe to the soldier settlers. When the second war came many thousands of them joined the veterans' guard and did their part a second time for the safety and protection of our country. Many thousands of their sons joined the forces and went overseas.

As I said before, there were 25,000 soldier settlers in 1919, but today I understand that not more than half of them are living. We must remember that most of them are now over 60 years of age. They have become old men, and I think it is only a matter of justice for us to say to the 500 who have

found it impossible to pay for their farms in all these years that we as a parliament and a people feel that we owe a great debt to them and that before they pass on, as hundreds of their comrades already have, they will be permitted to own the land for which they have tried to pay for so long a time.

I was speaking a moment ago about the difficulties these men encounter when they come to sell their products. I wish to mention the fact that those who come under the Veterans Land Act also face the same difficulty at the present time. When I was home for the Christmas vacation I had occasion to discuss the problem with a settler under the Veterans Land Act. He told me that over a year ago he wanted to cut some pulpwood. At that time he could have obtained \$20 a cord for it. He made application to the board for the privilege of cutting the pulpwood, but did not receive permission until nearly six months after his application had been filed. When he cut the pulpwood he found that the price was not \$20 a cord as it had been when he expected to cut it, but only \$10 per cord. Then he found that it was impossible for him to sell at that price. The board would not allow him to sell, so he is holding his pulpwood today and it is rotting in the woods. This man, who is a poor man, cut 25 cords of pulpwood in the hope that he would receive \$500 for it but today it is not worth anything. I say that because of the bureaucracy of the officials administering the Veterans Land Act the men are suffering somewhat the same as did these men under the Soldier Settlement Act.

I do not think, Mr. Speaker, it is necessary for me to labour this question at any length. As I said a moment ago, 34 years is a long time in which to ask a man to pay for property. I believe we owe it to these men to give them clear title. I understand there are only 500 men involved, and the amount is only \$500,000. Today we are paying \$150,000 a year to clear up the indebtedness on these farms. In a few years, at \$150,000 a year, we would soon equal the \$500,000 that is owing. I agree, therefore, with the hon. member for Battle River (Mr. Fair). Let us clean this matter up today and give these old men, who for so many years have hoped that before they died they would have their homes paid for, a clear title. I am sure we will not only be doing justice to them but justice to ourselves.

Some people may contend, and I have heard the argument in this house, that such an action would establish a precedent. As I said a few moments ago, the original agreement with these men has been changed many