

of the situation. I say at the present time we have done everything we could have in regard to all the proposals submitted to us.

Mr. PERLEY: I am pleased to hear the statement of the minister, but he might give us a little more information. He said that 2,360 have made prepayments. How are they distributed throughout the dominion? I have associated myself with the hon. member for Battle River in his request since he first made it, but I should like to point out this further fact. In 1937 when the minister's estimates were before the committee I suggested that the debt be written off and that these settlers be given clear title to their land. At that time I gave figures to show that the cost of administering the act and collecting the money and so on was almost as great as the amount the government would eventually receive. I just wish to make clear that that was the position I took as early as 1937. Since that time we have had the hon. member for Battle River take up the case, and I have been pleased to support him. I think the minister's statement was an interesting one, but I should like to point out that in the last couple of years we have had two good crops in western Canada and that they have resulted in a lot of these prepayments being made. I should also like to say that many of these old veterans have been working under difficult circumstances. I know some in my district who have two sons in this war. They have carried on under great difficulties and made the payments. I am pleased, however, to know that the situation is clearing up and I certainly wish to associate myself with the hon. member for Battle River.

Mr. FAIR: Mr. Chairman, I wish to thank the minister very sincerely for the statement he has made to-night in connection with the concessions that the government, through the minister, intends to make to these old soldier settlers.

Mr. MACKENZIE (Vancouver Centre): With deference may I correct that statement. I said that since we had considered the matter two or three weeks ago there have been given to the government alternative proposals which we have not yet been able to consider.

Mr. FAIR: I take it that it all means the same thing anyway. I thank the minister, and I think the government in its wisdom, possibly against the will of some of the powerful members, and perhaps in their own interest, decided to consider these questions favourably in the very near future.

It is more than twenty years since we thought we had won the old war successfully. I was not able to write as fast as the minister spoke and I did not get all his figures. I did get enough to convince me that several prepayments have been made during the eleven months of the last fiscal year. What I am concerned with, however, is the principle involved. I am a practical farmer, and I have gone through exactly the same hardships as those old soldier settlers with the exception that I did not have the bailiff at the door every time I could not make my payment. It was not my fault; as one of my hon. friends here suggested, I have better land than many of these old soldier settlers have; I knew a little more about land than they did and perhaps I had a little better break than they had. However, as I said, there is a principle involved, and it would seem to be the policy of the government or of the soldier settlement board to get money regardless of whence it comes. It is their intention to get it and clear up all these old debts. I think that is not good enough.

We have kept these old soldier settlers working and trying to pay off their debts on a quarter-section of land for twenty years, land that in many cases was not worth one thousand dollars if figured on a business basis. I do not think two per cent of the members of this house would ever try to go out and make these payments. These old soldier settlers are not asking anything from this or any other government, because after suffering all they have gone through they have paid for their land time and time again. When they bought the land wheat was close to \$3 a bushel and in 1932 it went down to 19½ cents a bushel for the best wheat in the world. I know that to my sorrow, for I sold thousands of bushels that year for 12½ cents a bushel after paying eleven cents a bushel for threshing. Now we have a business administration, and I ask them to use some common sense in dealing with these old soldier settlers. A number of these old soldier settlers are making prepayments this year for very good reasons. Not very long ago, through a return to a question of mine, information was brought to me which showed that in the years from 1930 to 1943 inclusive, a fourteen-year period, we had almost three thousand of these soldier settlers either sign quit claim deeds or forced to get off the land on being served with a thirty day notice. That is one very good reason for these fellows paying up; because if you look at the record you will find that since the war broke out a particular drive