

Soldier Settlement Act

I think in the latter part of his speech he did make a genuine attempt to carry out that pledge, for which I desire to congratulate him.

At six o'clock the Speaker resumed the chair and the House took recess.

After Recess

The House resumed at eight o'clock and again went into committee.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): We have had a pretty fair discussion of the resolution this afternoon. I think we have gathered pretty well the consensus of opinion as to how the bill should be redrafted, paying particular attention to paragraphs 5, 6 and 7. I should be very glad to have the resolution passed, and I will redraft the bill in accordance with what the general opinion of the committee seems to be as to the best method of readjustment. If I might be permitted to express my own personal opinion, it is that we should either have the readjustment as between the settler and the representative of the board, or, to shorten the process, name a committee composed preferably of the superintendent—there are two in my own province—a judge of the district court in the particular district, and a representative of the settlers, the decision of this committee to be final with respect to any adjustment. My thought—and I confess that I was more attracted by it as I listened to the discussion—is that it will be easier for the settler to attend such sittings. The judicial districts are not large, and the procedure will involve very little expense. I am hoping to save expenses to the soldier settler—who, of course, would appear for himself—as well as to the government. I am very much impressed by what the right hon. leader of the opposition said this afternoon, that the soldier settler should appear in person and present his case, and the board might very well be represented by the superintendent. What I have outlined I gather will be fairly satisfactory. Of course I shall be glad to discuss these matters with interested parties in all sections of the House, and so amend the bill as to provide for such a method of adjustment. I make that suggestion, if it is agreeable to the committee.

Mr. EVANS: I wish to say a word regarding one feature of this proposed legislation. This scheme will give some heart and courage to a good many who have been halting between two opinions, I have no doubt, for a

[Mr. Neill.]

long time. But we must also consider the case of the soldier who has been forced off his land in, say, the last two or three years, and has become discouraged and gone. His land has been taken over and some of it has been sold to new settlers comprising a number of those settled under the British government plan. I would make a plea for those who have already left their land. Our obligation to the returned man does not end when we have rescinded the contract and he is clear of the board. I believe there will be many who would be glad to go back on the land, and I cannot understand that our obligation with respect to those men has ceased. As I say, some of them have been forced off the land, their land has been sold, and I understand that in the case of those lands sold there has been an accumulation of \$20,000 over the price that was paid. Now, I do not think we should make money out of the returned soldiers in that way. I make an earnest plea on behalf of those who wish to go back to the land, and I should like the minister and the government to take that point into serious consideration.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): I am perfectly willing to consider any matter in connection with this matter of readjustment. At the same time I wish to point out to my hon. friend that it is a very difficult thing to meet every angle of the situation. I can think of a dozen different obstacles that would arise in endeavouring to deal with the men who are now off the land and have ceased their connections with the board. However, I am perfectly willing to give the subject my best consideration.

Mr. MEIGHEN: I am entirely in agreement with the minister that it is an utter impossibility to meet all these classes of cases. It cannot be done. How, for example, could you distinguish between soldiers who lost their land entirely through their own default or through their own mismanagement and misconduct, and those who perhaps were not quite so guilty? I know that if I were minister myself I would despair of attacking the task. I do not see how it can be attacked; but I simply use the fact that the member for Rosetown (Mr. Evans) has advanced this scheme on behalf of the soldiers who have been ousted from their properties to press upon the minister this: Let him keep just as close to the judiciary as he can in the settlement of everything. Let him keep the responsibility off the government and the government's representatives. If he once gets it there he will never in the world be able to