

depends on the treatment of these old veterans, who have been subjected to persecution during the past twenty-five or twenty-six years.

Mr. MACKENZIE (Vancouver Centre): The hon. member for Battle River has been consistent and strenuous in his advocacy of the case of these soldier settlers. The matter came up in committee or in the house some weeks ago; and I informed my hon. friend that on August 25 last year the government, after due consideration of the claim, had rejected them as such. Since then my hon. friend accompanied a delegation of western settlers to my office and, I believe, to other offices and made an able appeal with regard to these soldier settlers. The government considered the situation a second time, and the appeal which had been launched was again rejected. Since then, however, there have been brought to the attention of the administration alternative suggestions which have not yet been fully or finally considered.

May I tell the committee in a word or two some of the figures of the last year with regard to these fine old soldier settlers. The amount of current instalments due in the first eleven months of the fiscal year which began April 1, 1944, was \$642,704. The amount actually paid upon current instalments and arrears was \$785,662. The amount prepaid—I want the committee to appreciate this—during the year was \$761,252. That is, Mr. Chairman, the instalments due were \$642,000, and the amounts paid were \$1,546,000. Or, expressed in another way: the number of settlers with payments due in the last year was 5,322. The number who, in the first eleven months had made payments, was 89.4 per cent of the total, and the number of settlers who made prepayments in advance of their obligation was 2,630. These soldier settlers are my comrades, and they have the consideration and good feeling of every man in this house. They made prepayments in advance of their obligation in 2,630 cases; that is, exactly one-half of the total number of soldier settlers made prepayments upon their holdings.

Representations have been made, and made in a spirit of deep sincerity, by the hon. member for Battle River for further assistance to these soldier settlers. He has been especially active in this matter, and I commend him for it because I know he is sincere. It is contended, quite justly, that the Veterans' Land Act, which is for the veterans of this war who are going to settle on land, is a better act than the old Soldier Settlement Act, and that veterans of the old war should be given equal consideration with the veterans of the new

war. With that principle, I may tell my hon. friend, I am fully in accord. The Veterans' Land Act provides under certain conditions for a free grant of a portion of the cost of each settlement enterprise. The Soldier Settlement Act contained no such provision. It was found that the burden of debt placed upon the old settlers was too great and, by a series of measures enacted by this parliament from year to year, that burden was reduced.

When we were considering the New Veterans' Land Act in 1942 in an able committee of this parliament the government, as a result of the recommendations of that committee and of an able committee of departmental men with practical farming assistance and experience from outside this city, introduced into this house the present Veterans' Land Act. The free grant is an acceptance by the government in advance of the situation that developed under the Soldier Settlement Act, under which a part of the original liability had to be written off. Thus, Mr. Chairman, we sought to bring the two measures broadly into line with regard to the repayment obligations assumed by the settler.

The hon. member for Battle River—and I am not at all critical—has urged that the government should go still farther and wipe out all remaining indebtedness by issuing clear title to soldier settlers who have not yet completed their payments. Up to the present time the government has not found it possible to accede fully to this request, for reasons which the hon. member stated quite fairly in this house the other day, even though he did not agree with the conclusions we have reached.

There is one conspicuous difference between the Soldier Settlement Act and the Veterans' Land Act which the government had decided to remove and did remove. The Soldier Settlement Act called for the payment of interest at five per cent. The rate under the Veterans' Land Act is 3½ per cent. During the present session we decided that the rate of interest for all soldier settlers should be reduced from five per cent to 3½ per cent.

That briefly is the story. As I said a while ago, there is quite a lot of good sentiment behind the advocacy of the case advanced in this house by the hon. member for Battle River. Upon the facts as submitted to me and the prepayments made—which I think are in advance of any commercial enterprise in Canada—in the last year by the old soldier settlers of Canada, and reminding him that in the last few days alternative proposals have been submitted to the government but not yet decided upon in regard to the possible meeting