

Mr. CRERAR: Certainly. My hon. friend ought to inform himself before he starts making speeches.

Mr. CASTLEDEN: I have informed myself, and I have written to the department about plenty of these cases. Moreover, I have talked with dozens of returned men, and what I have learned has led me to the conclusion that the attitude of the department is all wrong. These men are in dire circumstances. I take up the case of one man and I say, what about this man? He has done the best he can. I get a reply saying that this man's neighbour did perfectly well; that he paid off his indebtedness, and that if any further adjustment is made, why, the man who has nearly paid off his indebtedness will feel that he is being discriminated against. But when I investigate the other man's position I find that he had three or four sons to help him or had a large outside income, and that was the only reason why he could carry on.

Another abuse is this. The indebtedness of the soldier settler is so great that he feels he cannot possibly pay it off. The income from the farm has declined over recent years, and the representative of the soldier settlement board is told to come round and get the man to sign a quit-claim deed. The man says that if he does that, the land will be put up for sale. He is told, yes, that is what will happen. He asks if he will have an opportunity of buying it back, or if some member of his family will have an opportunity of buying it back at the price at which it will be sold to someone else, and he is informed that he will not be permitted to do this. That is an unfair practice.

There are not many of these old veterans left on the land, and I am going to make this plea to the minister. Surely, under the circumstances, these men are entitled, in the last years of their lives, to be freed from this continual hounding. They did their best for a number of years, but circumstances beyond their control made it impossible for them to pay off their indebtedness. In the twilight of their lives, after all that they have done, they should be given the title to their land. The people of Canada will not begrudge them that. The very recommendations brought down under the new scheme show that the old plan was entirely wrong. There was a fundamental weakness in the whole system. The original indebtedness was out of all proportion, and when the price of the commodities which the farmer could produce sank to a level at which he could not even meet interest payments, his burden became impossible.

[Mr. Castleden.]

There has been some adjustment, I agree, but it has not been adequate. It has still left the soldier settler with a burden which he cannot carry. The financial arrangements in this new scheme have been introduced because the old scheme was not equitable. It was unjust; and if there have been injustices in the past, why not wipe them out for the few men who are left? The older men have been up against a tough proposition. There is no appreciation of these facts as far as the administration is concerned. When the young men from these districts go to enlist to-day and they observe the way in which the soldier settlement board is treating the old veterans; when they read the record of what has happened to a number of them, many of them having proved their cases, where these men are up against an impossible job, I can tell the minister that it has a very serious effect, so serious that we find editorials written in newspapers supporting the government protesting against the treatment that has been meted out to these men. They gave the best they had for this land. They were willing to give so much, and they are treated shamefully.

Mr. WRIGHT: The other minister was not present when the special committee were considering these recommendations which they have embodied in the report tabled on Friday, July 17, but the Minister of Mines and Resources was there, and he stated that it was his opinion that the government would, by order in council, bring these recommendations into effect this year and that the Soldier Settlement Act would be revised next year so as to include them in its provisions. The minister should give us an assurance that this will take place.

Mr. CRERAR: My hon. friend is not stating the facts correctly. What was stated was this, that it would require legislation to reduce the rate of interest, which is now statutory at 5 per cent under the old soldier settlement scheme, to 3½ per cent. I said to the committee, as I recall, that I did not think it would be very likely that such legislation could be brought in this year, but if the government considered it favourably it would be decided to make that recommendation and validate it next year by statute. That was what was stated. I did not give a promise that the rate of interest would be reduced to 3½ per cent. That is a matter which concerns the Department of Finance more than the Department of Mines and Resources. It is a matter that the government has to take into consideration. Really,