

Prairie Farm Assistance Act

them. They have never been cleared. The land is not owned by the government merely because it may be poor land, as much of the land in the south is. The provincial government have already come to us and asked us to assist in getting that land cleared, in order that they can move settlers onto it. It has been suggested to us that the settlers they want to put onto it are the settlers we want to take off this submarginal land in the south. We have gone so far in the discussions as to say that we would not be interested under any other circumstances. If the province merely intended to open this land up for different settlers, such as people coming from Europe, Britain or the United States, we would not be interested in making any special arrangements about it which would involve this legislation.

We say, if you are going to consider moving people off the submarginal land in the south upon which we are now paying prairie farm assistance, and taking those people up to that area, then we are prepared to talk about an agreement. This provision says that if that kind of agreement is entered into, provision can be made for this land being subject to prairie farm assistance; that is the meaning of the section. I believe that covers every case except one.

The member for Assiniboia has suggested that we are discriminating against some people. I do not think the act discriminates for or against anyone at all, unless it be the veterans. It discriminates in giving them an advantage over other people and it discriminates in giving persons who have gone into co-operative farms an advantage over other people.

Mr. Argue: It did not take away any advantage they would have.

Mr. Gardiner: They did not have any advantage when they took that land. This act did not intend that land to be under cultivation.

Mr. Argue: It did not say that.

Mr. Gardiner: It did not say that, but if we had been asked for our opinion, that is what we would have said. Then they come along and say: "Here is a veteran who wants to settle near his people. There is a piece of that land there. Surely you are not going to deny this veteran the right to settle on it." The Alberta government will tell you that is the sort of appeal that has been made to them, and the Saskatchewan government will tell you the same thing. I know it is the kind of appeal that has been made to us. We have discriminated against other people in favour of the veterans, and I think quite properly so. We may feel he has made a mistake in some

cases, but I think he has the right to make a mistake. We have simply left him under the act, and there is discrimination there.

The only other case is that of men who have bought land from the government since December 31, 1940. So far as I have the records, only about 12,000 acres have been dealt with in that way. There may have been some more recently of which I have not the record, but if so it is a small amount. Then there are others who have leased land. We do not know how large that group is. They have leased it on exactly the same basis as the returned veteran has been asking for land. They say their parents live near there, and they would like to get a piece of land. In spite of the fact that their parents have been on prairie farm assistance every year since this act was put into effect, except one, they have taken that land and broken it up. They are trying to live on it. We are not objecting to their trying to live on it; that is their own choice. Under these circumstances we do not think they should come under this act.

So far as making a check is concerned, I suggested in the committee that we wanted this to be retroactive so that we could check those cases. I stated that the matter had already been discussed with the government and that the government had agreed that after we have checked these cases, if we find that there is any great hardship on persons who have not just entered into the hardships of their own free choice, we would consider bringing down an amendment next year. But we would like this legislation as it is now drafted so that we can go out and make a check and satisfy people in other parts of Canada that we are not bringing people under this act who should not be brought under it.

Mr. Argue: After the minister makes the check, would the criterion, with regard to anyone he might then bring back under the act, be whether or not the land being farmed was suitable for farming—in other words, that people were not misusing this act in order to bring in poor lands, but were farming land that was good. After the check is made to find out if that is the case, would he give consideration to that point?

Mr. Gardiner: I am satisfied that any area down in that section of the country in which the people have had to draw under this act for ten years out of the last eleven is not a good enough area in which to break up new land. I think the sooner they are told that, the better for them; otherwise they are just going to live there and half starve to death for the rest of their time. That is the thing that we want to check—whether these people