

On section 3—Sale of reclaimed lands.

Mr. ROBB: Will the minister explain subsection 3 of this clause which reads:

The minister may, instead of selling such lands, lease the whole or any part of the same, and may also lease any land unsold.

Does that refer to lands other than those that are reclaimed?

Mr. MEIGHEN: Oh no, that could only refer to lands included within the area of reclamation, lands affected by the reclamation scheme. It means this: An upset price will be fixed on the valuation before they are offered for sale at public auction. If the upset price is not bid we are empowered to rent the lands in the meantime until they are otherwise disposed of. It strikes me that possibly it would be wise to have power to rent the land before offering it to public auction, because lands reclaimed by drainage do not reach their full value for some time. It takes cultivation and exposure to the sun to free the land from that moisture that has been in it for so long. I think the best time to sell these lands would not be immediately after reclamation.

Mr. ROBB: I should have read the whole clause to the minister. There seems to be a confusion of words. Why this distinction? It would look as if it referred to two different classes of land.

Mr. MEIGHEN: I do not think that the words are unnecessary.

Mr. MURPHY: Would the insertion of the word "such" before "land" meet the hon. gentleman's suggestion?

Mr. MEIGHEN: It might make it clearer. I understand that the point of the hon. gentleman is that the words are surplusage?

Mr. ROBB: Yes.

Mr. MEIGHEN: But it is intended to have this legal effect, that the minister may, instead of selling the land, lease the whole or any part thereof. It might be held that the minister could elect whether he could lease or sell, but once having elected, could not change. We want to make it clear that while he may elect to sell he may lease.

Mr. LAPOINTE (Kamouraska): According to subsection 1, the minister may sell the lands subject to the conditions prescribed by the Governor in Council. According to sub-section 2 he may transfer them to the Soldiers' Settlement Board at a valuation to be fixed by the Governor in Council. But under subsection 3 he may lease the land

[Mr. Meighen.]

at any price he may see fit to ask. Why not make the rental under the lease subject to the approval of the Governor in Council, as well as the price in case of sale?

Mr. MEIGHEN: I would not have any objection. Of course, the rental in leasing is not so vital as the price on a sale. Indeed, as we had the Bill at first, the Governor in Council was not required to assent even to the price on sale. So much goes before Council—

Mr. McMASTER: You will be bringing some of it before Parliament pretty soon.

Mr. MEIGHEN: I will be very sorry for Parliament if it all comes before it. The only effective and practical way is for the minister to handle it. I have no objection to it going before Council. It is something of a protection for the minister, but anybody who has been a member of Council knows that the deliberation is not increased a great deal.

Mr. MURPHY: Might I suggest to my hon. friend that special legislation affecting these lands after reclamation should be unnecessary in view of the fact that the general land Act would apply to such land in the absence of a special provision. Is there any necessity for this special provision, inasmuch as the land would become ordinary land after reclamation, and, if so, would not the ordinary law apply to it?

Mr. MEIGHEN: Yes, but the general law does not permit of sale except in very rare cases. The power of the minister to sell land is so limited that it would not be sufficient to leave this to the operation of the general law. He can sell fractions of quarter-sections, and only a certain amount and under certain conditions. We want to sell this land by auction so that we can recoup the treasury the cost of improving it.

Mr. SINCLAIR (Guysborough): Is there any provision made in the Estimates for the coming fiscal year to administer this Act?

Mr. MEIGHEN: Not yet.

On section 4—Payments for land, how to be made:

Mr. MEIGHEN: These are the alternate terms of payment in case of sale by auction, but the House must observe that the previous section provides that the land can be turned over to the Soldiers' Settlement Board for disposition by that Board. In that event these terms do not apply. In the event of an ordinary sale the terms that are applicable to the operations of the Board would not come into play.