

**GUARDING THE PEOPLE'S RIGHTS.**

Congressman Kem is a faithful and keen-eyed guardian of the rights and interests of the people.

Not long ago Representative Pickler of South Dakota, introduced a bill to amend the timber culture act. Its chief ostensible purpose was to allow persons who had faithfully tried to live up to the requirements of the tree claim law for eight years to make final proof regardless of the number of trees on the claim. But tacked onto this were two provisos:

1st. Repealing the provision that requires the man to be "an actual bona fide resident of the state or territory in which said land is located."

2nd. Repealing a similar provision in the desert land laws, so as to permit non-residents to enter lands of that class.

Mr. Pickler made an effort to get this bill through without attracting any attention, but Mr. Kem was on the lookout. He promptly called the attention of a number of others to the nature of the bill, and organized a fight on it. He made an excellent short speech from which the following is a portion:

Mr. Speaker, I move to strike out the last section of this bill, and upon that motion I wish to offer a few remarks. As the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. Holman) has well said the spirit and intention of the land laws of our country was to provide homes for the homeless—for those who were willing to exercise their energy and courage in developing a new country for the purpose of building up and establishing homes.

Under these laws vast areas of wild and desert lands have been reclaimed from their wild state, and have become settled and civilized, and good, comfortable homes established all over them. We have for a number of years been struggling against the land-sharks, the land-grabbers who have been trying to get possession of the public domain. The people have been earnestly protesting and have been endeavoring to throw additional safeguards around these lands to preserve the remainder of them for the purposes for which the land laws were originally enacted. And I am astonished that my friend from South Dakota, a gentleman who must be cognizant of the practical workings of our land laws and the dangers that have beset the principles involved, should father this bill with that clause in it. For the people have been endeavoring, and every congress for years has taken action time and again to protect the homestead settlers and preserve the public lands for the use and occupancy of the people, and yet I find that he comes here with a proposition that throws down every bar, that takes away every safeguard and throws open to every landshark and speculator in the United States the balance of the lands yet remaining and not settled upon.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think my friend from South Dakota knows full well that despite the different safeguards that have been thrown around these lands, the spirit of the law, if not its letter, has been violated continually, and that men have become possessed of large bodies of public lands in a manner that was never contemplated when the laws were enacted. Despite all of these safeguards, thousands of acres of the lands are today in possession of people who are not entitled and should not be possessed of them.

But in the face of the fact that with all of the safeguards that could be placed around them we have been unable to protect the rightful owner in the possession of the land, he comes here with a proposition to let down the last bar, to destroy the last safeguard and make a bid open and wide to every land speculator and grabber in the United States of America to step in and take possession. If this bill passes that is just what will be done.

Under the homestead law men have got possession of thousands of acres of the best lands of the country, notwithstanding the fact that the law restricts

them to 160 acres, and provides that they must be residents on the land, and that they must be taken up for the purpose of making and establishing homes. They have done it in South Dakota; they have done it in my country, and in every state and territory of the Union where we had public lands open to settlement, and they did it by simply employing some one to settle on the lands, build a little shanty, put up some insignificant improvements, and by furnishing the money to make final proof and paying a small amount per month to the person living upon it, the individual gets title and immediately turns it over the grabber who furnished the money.

Now the gentleman from South Dakota proposes to go still farther and remove all barriers, making a bid for every land monopolist in the country to step in and take possession.

I am in favor of that portion of the bill relating to actual settlers; and I realize the fact that this part of the bill relating to timber culture would be some relief to individuals who are residents of the country, and who have gone through all of the hardships incidental to pioneer life and to the building up and settlement of the west.

It would be some relief to certain individuals that I think are entitled to relief; but upon the other hand, in the last clause, section 2, the gates are again thrown wide open in this respect. It allows a man who is a non-resident, who has perhaps never seen the western country, who has not gone through any of the hardships incidental to pioneer life or to the building up of the country, to get possession of that land, and thereby entitle him to all of the benefits to be derived from the actual location of settlers on the land adjacent that has been developed, not by himself but by others, who have gone in and by their hard work have developed the country, and in doing so have made valuable this land which he has a timber claim upon.

In view of that fact I am opposed to the whole bill so far as it relates to non-residents, and I am decidedly opposed to the last section of the bill, the one that my amendment affects; and I want to say, that after all the information we have in regard to the land steals in our country and the rapidity with which the lands have been monopolized by private corporations, syndicates and public corporations at different times, I hope the house will not allow this bill to pass. It does seem to me, Mr. Speaker, that the time has come when this thing should be squarely sat down upon and that we should say, "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther."

Mr. Kem's speech was followed by an animated and thorough discussion of the bill. Mr. Pickler finally asked leave to "withdraw the bill and let it lie over without prejudice," which was granted.

This is only one of a number of instances in which Mr. Kem has been heard from on measures relating especially to the interests of his constituents, and every time he has carried his point.

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