

while the Commissioner of Taxes found the task very trying to his department of furnishing the information required from that source for the purpose of a comprehensive consideration by the General Board of the securities which have been offered by applicants for advances.

Another cause of delay is the condition which has retarded the completion of the mortgages for advances on the securities of the interests in the Crown leaseholds—the condition that the consent of the Land Boards must be obtained to the mortgages of such interests. The difficulty in this respect will be overcome by the adoption throughout the colony of a suggestion which has been made by the Commissioner of Crown Lands at Christchurch, that the authority which, to save delay, he has obtained from his Board, to approve daily on behalf of the Board of all mortgages as they are submitted, might be obtained by the Commissioners of Crown Lands throughout the colony. I have addressed the Surveyor-General with this object, and I observe that the Commissioner of Crown Lands for Wellington has been authorised to consent for the Land Board of his district. But in a case of an application where the circumstances are all favourable, where but a few days are required for the course of post, where the valuer can, without delay, proceed to inspect and report upon the property, and can quickly and easily reach it, and where no question may arise to occasion delay, two or three weeks at the least must elapse before the Board could arrive at its final resolution, and a notice of that resolution be received by the applicant. There are, however, in many cases, a long and uncertain course of post, an inaccessible property, other engagements of the valuer, and doubts to solve; and under such circumstances the result of an application could not, perhaps, be determined and communicated to the applicant without a delay which might extend to six weeks or more.

The settlers who, being in want of money and seeking the benefit of the Act, regard themselves as entitled to an advance of the whole proportion which the Board may authorise of the present estimated realisable value of the security, and who apply for that proportion on the favourable estimate which we may generally be expected to form of the value of our own property, can only be disappointed. And then it is only reasonable to suppose that the majority of those who would press most urgently for pecuniary relief would be largely of the class whose property does not afford a sufficient security, and whom the provisions of the Act must consequently disappoint. It would seem; from these considerations, that applicants for loans under the Act must, as a rule, suffer disappointment in some degree, and that, if the satisfaction of applicants generally is to be the measure of a satisfactory administration, condemnation must be unavoidable so long as the relief is to be on the condition of “security” and consistent with the “public safety.” At present there is no authority in the Act to justify relief or assistance even to the struggling settler, whatever may be his circumstances or distresses, who cannot offer to mortgage land which the Act prescribes as a security, and on which, in the opinion of the Board, the relief could be granted without risk of loss.

The judgment, however, may not be one of unqualified condemnation if the capital fund which the Act provides, and for which the colony is responsible, can be regarded as the fund of an estate to be administered in the common interest of all persons, whether applicants or not—as a capital fund to be so invested in mortgages of the rural lands of the colony that, while the settlers possessing these lands may be relieved and an obstacle to the progress of the colony removed, there may be no risk of loss to the fund itself; or if the object of the measure is conceived to provide not so much that a settler should have a right to borrow to the utmost, or should be encouraged to borrow, as that, in the interests of the colony, the settlers who cannot avoid borrowing may do so to a limited extent, and on the most liberal terms that the public safety will allow,—as that oppressive rates of interest may cease on the mortgage of farm lands of unquestionable security.

And, in truth, the provisions of the Act might appear to be designed to afford to the settlers to whom advances of small sums of money are necessary, and who have in their lands the necessary security, the assistance and facilities necessary to enable them to eventually become free from debt without a sacrifice of any property. The charges for the valuation for the purposes of an advance and for the legal costs of the necessary mortgage are as low as possible for reliable services. The consideration to the borrower is not only in the low rate of interest on the advance, but in the condition that the amount may at any time be wholly repaid, or may be repaid by such instalments of £5, or a multiple of £5, as the borrower may find convenient, in addition to the half-yearly instalments of one-half per cent. required by the mortgage; and the settlers, whether they should borrow money under this Act or not, might be expected to welcome a recourse for capital on terms so considerate. The provision for repayment of the amount wholly or by small instalments, at the times and of the amounts to suit the convenience of the borrower, is calculated to induce economy and enable him to invest, so to speak, on his own property, his savings or the profits of his business—that is, to invest by paying off the debt for which that property would be the security, every sum that he may have to spare of £5 or more.

Some of the provisions of the Advances to Settlers Act have been found inoperative or unsatisfactory. The solicitor to this office finding that, though an occupation license, with right of purchase under “The Land Act, 1892,” was a security on which an advance could be granted under the Government Advances to Settlers Act, the District Land Registrar for the Wellington District, under instructions from the Registrar-General, was refusing to register such licenses, advised therefore that effect could not be given to any resolution authorising an advance on such security. The provisions of the Advances to Settlers Act must accordingly remain inoperative as respects such land unless the registration of the licenses should be authorised by fresh legislation.

Some delay in the preparation of the mortgages on leasehold interests was occasioned by the conflict of the provisions of the seventh covenant of the Fourth Schedule to “The Government Advances to Settlers Act, 1894,” which provides that fourteen days shall be the period for sale on default, with the provisions of subsection (3) of section 83 of “The Land Act, 1892,” which fixes the period at one month. This question arose, and was settled, as will be gathered from the correspondence, of which the following is a copy:—