

LEGISLATION

By section 28 of the Statutes Amendment Act, 1943, the term "discharged serviceman," for the purposes of the Small Farms Act, 1932-33, is extended, and by section 29 of the same Act special provision is made with respect to leases to discharged servicemen.

The Reserves and other Lands Disposal Act, 1943, contains twelve sections dealing with Crown lands, reserves, endowments, and other lands.

Details concerning the Servicemen's Settlement and Land Sales Act, 1943, are given under a separate heading.

POSTPONEMENTS, REMISSIONS, AND ARREARS OF RENT AND INTEREST

Rents and interest the payment of which remained postponed at 31st March amounted to £16,576. Arrears of rent and interest at the 31st March (including arrears in respect of the current half-yearly charge) totalled £139,205, while remissions for the year totalled £23,120.

THE SERVICEMEN'S SETTLEMENT AND LAND SALES ACT, 1943

This Act came into operation on 18th October, 1943. The objects of the Act, as set out in the preamble, are—

- (1) To provide for the acquisition of land for the settlement of discharged servicemen ;
- (2) To provide for the control of sales and leases of land in order to facilitate the settlement of discharged servicemen ; and
- (3) To prevent undue increases in the price of land, the undue aggregation of land, and its use for speculative or uneconomic purposes.

Part I of the Act established the Land Sales Court consisting of a Judge, with the status of a Judge of the Supreme Court, and two other members appointed by His Excellency the Governor-General in Council. It also established such number of Land Sales Committees as the Governor-General in Council may think necessary. Each Committee has a distinctive name and consists of not more than three members.

On 18th October the Hon. G. P. Finlay, a Judge of the Supreme Court, was appointed Judge of the Land Sales Court, and Messrs. W. E. Scott, of Kapuni, farmer, and W. Stewart, of Wellington, retired Valuer-General, were appointed members of the Court. Fifteen Land Sales Committees, each of three members, were appointed ; the Chairmen in most cases are practising solicitors, and it has been necessary in a few cases to appoint deputy Chairmen, who act when required.

Part II of the Act provides for the taking of land for the settlement of discharged servicemen, provided such land is capable of subdivision into two or more economic units, and provided also that the owner shall have the right to retain one of the subdivisions.

To 31st March, 1944, only one property had been taken under Part II, an area of 1,200 acres, approximately, in Marlborough, which will be subdivided into three farms and balloted for shortly. The taking of other areas is under action.

Part III of the Act provides that, with certain exceptions set out in the Act, no land shall be sold or transferred, or leased for a period of not less than three years, without the consent of the Court. Application for the consent of the Court is filed in accordance with the prescribed forms in one of the eleven offices of the Court throughout the Dominion, and the application is then referred to the Land Sales Committee operating in the locality. If necessary, a public hearing is held at which all persons interested in the transaction have the right to be heard. Any person affected by the Order of the Committee has a right of appeal to the Land Sales Court, such appeal to be lodged within fourteen days of the filing of the order.

Up to 31st March, 1944, a total of 10,623 applications had been filed, of which 953 related to farm land and 9,670 to other than farm land. Of this number, 8,618 had been finally dealt with, of which 663 were farm land and 7,955 other than farm land. Of the applications granted, approximately 74 per cent. were granted without a hearing, 13 per cent. after a hearing, and 11 per cent. subject to conditions. The percentage of those refused by the Committee or withdrawn by the parties is only 2 per cent. Although the number of applications outstanding at 31st March, 1944, was 2,005, it should be noted that the number filed for the month of March alone was 3,213. Further, some of these cases had already been set down for hearing early in April. It can therefore be said fairly that the handling of the applications is running smoothly and expeditiously, and only a relatively small number of cases take any length of time for the Committee's decision to be known. Those applications which do take some while are cases where valuations are required or further particulars are necessary.

The main difficulty in the expeditious working of the Act is the obtaining of valuations. Additional Valuers are being employed by the State Departments, but it will be realized that with so many Valuers still serving in the Armed Forces it is not easy to obtain trained staff. Every endeavour is being made to employ additional Valuers, and, where necessary, Valuers outside the State Departments are being engaged to enable all applications to be considered as quickly as possible.

The number of appeals filed against Committees' orders is 44, but, of this number, 17 were subsequently withdrawn. Of the appeals heard, 5 were dismissed, 4 allowed, and 3 allowed in part. The Court makes the practice of travelling to the various centres for the hearing of appeals, and so far sittings have been held in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, Timaru, and Nelson.