

## REPORT.

## PART I.—SETTLEMENT DURING YEAR.

## REVIEW OF POSITION.

1. The successful settlement of our returned soldiers on the land is recognized as of paramount importance, and has continuously occupied the attention of the Government since the despatch of the first Expeditionary Force. The passing of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act in 1915 laid down in concrete form the methods and principles on which land was to be provided and allotted to discharged members of the Expeditionary Forces on their return to New Zealand; and the amending Act of last year extended its scope in many respects. In addition, other provisions in the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1915, and Part II of the War Legislation Amendment Act, 1916, provide for further concessions to members of the Expeditionary Forces both during their period of service and afterwards. Regulations were prepared and issued defining the methods and giving effect to the provisions of the Act, and every possible care has been taken by all officers of the Department entrusted with the administration of the Act to carry out in as sympathetic a manner as possible the provisions of the statutes, having due regard to the individual requirements of the selectors and the intentions of the Government.

2. On the whole the results have been very satisfactory, but it must be borne in mind that up to the present only comparatively few of the members of the Expeditionary Forces have returned to New Zealand and been discharged. The bulk of the work of settlement therefore still remains to be done, and a large proportion of the lands of the Dominion suitable for their occupation should be retained until the main body of the Expeditionary Force returns to our shores, so as to ensure that all our soldiers have an equal chance of securing land, and in particular, that those who have served continuously or for long periods at the front shall not be overlooked in favour of others who may have returned to New Zealand after a short period of service.

3. In this connection it cannot be too strongly emphasized that the success of the soldiers as settlers depends very largely on their own individual efforts. The Government is finding the land and financing them in order that those who wish to do so may earn their living by that means, and the concession granted must not be regarded as being in the nature of a bounty that can be exploited in any way. The law wisely makes this quite clear by prohibiting the transfer or sale of the allotments for a period of ten years after selection except with the approval of the Minister and Land Board. The majority of the soldiers already settled realize this, and are working in a manner that gives great promise of success; some have been most successful already, but a few have shown that they have neither the will nor the capacity to succeed. The position may, however, be considered very encouraging as the percentage of failures is not higher than it would be in ordinary settlement.

During the year full information was given to all inquirers, and from time to time various particulars were published by the Government in the Press so as to bring the methods and procedure in the application for and allotment of land, to the notice of all interested persons.

4. The problems that confront the Government are many, and it is evident that only a strict and sympathetic co-operation between the individual applicants, the various societies that work on their behalf, the Land Boards, Government Departments, and officers administering the Act can ensure the fullest success being given to the scheme of settlement which has been launched under such favourable auspices.

It is pleasing to record the manner in which the Land Boards, departmental officers, representatives of various soldiers' societies, and administrators of patriotic funds, together with individual members of the general public, have up to the present responded to the call upon their services, and every effort will be made in the future, as in the past, to keep in close touch with all sections of the community who are in any way affected by the operations of the Act.

## AMENDMENT OF ACT.

5. As was to be expected with legislation dealing with a new problem, a few months' experience of the working of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, 1915, made it desirable that some of its provisions should be extended, and the amending Act of last year provided that residents of New Zealand who have served with other Forces during the present war should be permitted to acquire land under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, and the financial assistance provided for in that Act may now be given to any discharged soldier who is the lessee or licensee of any of the land that is administered by a Land Board though not acquired under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act. Land required for the purposes of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act may be taken compulsorily under the Public Works Act, 1908, as well as purchased under the Land for Settlements Act, and authority was given to raise £500,000 for the acquisition of land for the settlement of discharged soldiers, whilst the amount authorized to be raised for the purpose of advances under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act was increased from £50,000 to £100,000.

6. The Appropriation Act, 1916, authorized the expenditure of £20,000 for roading lands set apart under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act.