

AMENDMENT OF ACT.

16. The Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act extends the previously existing powers of the Minister to make advances of money for the purpose of assisting discharged soldiers. The additional purposes for which advances may be made are—

- (a.) The purchase of the fee-simple of any private land or Native land, together with the improvements thereon :
- (b.) The acquisition by assignment or transfer of any lease of any Crown land, settlement land, or other land administered by a Land Board :
- (c.) The clearing, fencing, draining, and general improvement (including the erection of buildings) of any land owned in fee-simple by a discharged soldier :
- (d.) The discharge of any mortgage affecting any land owned in fee-simple by a discharged soldier, or affecting any land administered by a Land Board and held by a discharged soldier under lease or license :
- (e.) The purchase of plant, implements, stock, seeds, plants, trees, and such other things as may be deemed necessary for the successful occupation of any land owned in fee-simple by a discharged soldier.

17. Another important provision in this Act relates to the acquisition by the Crown on behalf of individual discharged soldiers of privately owned land in cases where such soldiers are not in a sufficiently good financial position to themselves purchase without the assistance of the Crown.

18. Provision is also made in this Act for the acquisition of land for soldiers' dwellings, the erection thereon of suitable houses, and the letting thereof to discharged soldiers on terms somewhat similar to those adopted in the case of what are generally known as workers' dwellings.

REGULATIONS.

19. Regulations have been issued providing for the making of advances authorized by section 2 of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act, 1917. Under these regulations an amount up to £2,500 may be advanced to a discharged soldier to assist him in acquiring freehold land or land held under lease from a Land Board, the advance with interest at 5 per centum per annum being repayable by instalments over a period of 36½ years. The opportunity thus offered to discharged soldiers to select and negotiate for the purchase of their own holdings is much appreciated, and transactions have been numerous.

20. Under section 4 of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act, 1917, power is provided to erect dwellings in towns and dispose of them to discharged soldiers. The necessary regulations have been issued, but on account of the present high cost of building no dwellings have yet been erected.

21. Important amendments were made to the regulations governing the making of advances, with the object of affording to soldiers assistance in the manner that would prove most useful and convenient to them. The necessity for obtaining separate approval to every transaction has been overcome, and advances on current account substituted up to a limit to be fixed by the Minister. This has been found to greatly simplify transactions. Provision was also made for extending the limit of advance to £750 in cases in which there are special circumstances to justify it.

LAND FOR MAORI SOLDIERS.

22. During the year 35,583 acres of Native land in the Owahaoko A East, A1B, B East, D1, and D7 Blocks has been proclaimed under section 368 of the Native Land Act, 1909, and section 4 of the Native Land Amendment and Native Land Claims Adjustment Act, 1917, which authorizes owners of Native land to donate it to the Crown for settlement by discharged Maori soldiers under section 3 or 4 of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, 1915. As it was donated for a special purpose, it is proposed to subdivide and settle the land when a demand from returned Maori soldiers warrants such action.

PART II.—FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.

ADVANCES.

23. The total amount raised by issue of debentures at the 31st March amounted to £160,000, of which sum £36,000 was raised during the year ended 31st March, 1917.

24. For the past financial year the sum of £113,318 was advanced on mortgage, for the purpose of assisting soldiers to erect dwellings and effect general improvements to their holdings, as well as enabling them to purchase stock, farming implements, &c., and cultivate their lands for the purpose of cropping. The whole of the advances for the erection of buildings, the carrying-out of other improvements, and the purchase of stock, chattels, &c., were made on the certificates of the Crown Lands Rangers.

25. A substantial portion of the total amount advanced was earned by the settlers putting their own labour into improving their sections instead of letting the work out on contract. This enabled them to obtain a means of livelihood during the period that their lands were not in a position to wholly support them.

26. Under the amended regulations of the 18th October, 1917, readvances may now be made by the Commissioner of Crown Lands against credits derived from the sale of stock or produce