

## REPORT.

1. DURING the year increasingly large demands for land were made by members of the Expeditionary Forces and others qualified under the Act who had returned to New Zealand and were anxious to settle upon the land. At the time of writing applications are very numerous indeed, and there is every prospect of an even greater demand for land this year than previously. This increase in applications and the numerous requests for information threw a very heavy strain upon the staff of the Department, as it has always been the desire of the Government to meet the requirements of returned soldiers as fully as possible and to afford every facility to inquirers for land to enable them to secure suitable holdings under favourable conditions. It may not be out of place to briefly set out the procedure adopted to deal with returned soldiers.

### PROCEDURE IN FORCE.

2. There appears to be much confusion in the minds of the public regarding methods adopted for the purchase of land for returned soldiers, and this arises from the fact that the purchasing is carried out by two distinct methods.

The Land Purchase Board proper deals with all estates purchased by the Government for subdivision, and also with all proposals to purchase under section 3 of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act, 1917. The titles to such purchases are vested in the Crown, and the land is subsequently disposed of to the soldiers on the tenures set out in the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Acts.

The Lands Department, however, makes all advances for assisting to purchase under section 2 of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act, 1917, and the titles for such purchases are vested in the persons for whom the purchases, or advances towards assisting the purchases, are made.

Purchases under the aforesaid section 2 include all urban and suburban residences, and the provisions of this section have proved so popular that a very large proportion of the whole are now conducted under that system. Up to the time of writing this report over 2,300 purchases and advances have been made, and it will be understood, therefore, as stated above, that a very severe strain has been put upon the staff of the Department.

3. There has been so much general criticism of the methods of land-purchase for soldiers that it may be advisable here to point out that the Land Purchase Board, in addition to its Chairman and members located in Wellington, has two local representatives in each land district, and the Board invariably employs local valuers before deciding upon a recommendation to the Government to buy any property.

4. In conducting purchases under section 2 of the 1917 Act, which, as already stated, is quite distinct from purchases made by the Land Purchase Board, the soldier, having obtained an option over a property, forwards the application to the local Commissioner of Crown Lands, who obtains reports and valuations, and the Land Board, after due consideration, recommends the Minister to approve. The resolution, together with all necessary papers, is forwarded to the Head Office, and after careful consideration there, is sent on to the Minister, who approves if he agrees with the recommendation.

5. A leaflet showing in a comprehensive manner the provisions of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, and its amendments, and regulations issued thereunder, has been compiled, and widely distributed by the High Commissioner for New Zealand to members of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in London, and to officers of the Force to enable them to acquaint the men on the transports with the provisions made by the New Zealand Government. This leaflet is also handed to each soldier as he arrives in New Zealand, whilst copies are sent to all the branches of the Returned Soldiers' Associations, and to such other institutions and persons as express a desire for them, or to whom they would be of value. The bulk of the information is also incorporated in the Soldiers' Guide issued by the Defence Department, and this also being handed to the soldier as he returns to New Zealand gives him all possible information as to what has been done to meet his desire to settle on the land. The regulations under the Act have also been widely distributed.

6. When a soldier calls at any office of the Department he is dealt with wherever possible by an officer specially detailed for that duty, whose business it is to see that the inquirer is supplied with full particulars of all lands available for application, and that he is made aware of the conditions under which they are available for selection. He is given the necessary forms of application and information how to obtain town properties, rural properties, and, if necessary, advances for the working of any farm he may already hold. An application when made is received by the Commissioner of Crown Lands for the land district in which the land is situated, and the qualifications of the applicant are immediately inquired into in order that his capabilities and the likelihood of his succeeding on the holding for which he has applied may be considered. When this necessary examination has been made the application is referred to the Land Board, and if necessary a ballot is taken to decide the right to select, and the Board at its first meeting deals with the application and promptly notifies the applicant. If successful he is then in a position to go on to the land immediately and to apply for an advance up to £750 (or in cases of bush land up to £1,250) to enable him to stock his farm and to erect the necessary dwelling and carry out improvements.

7. For general information it may be stated that there are two ways by which a soldier can acquire a farm—namely, by the selection of a suitable holding from amongst the Crown and settlement land opened under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, or, if he is unsuccessful at a ballot for such land, or cannot find a holding to his liking amongst those available for selection, he may be granted an advance up to £2,500 to purchase the freehold of private land, provided that the Government valuation sustains this amount. He acquires the fee-simple of the land by giving a first mortgage to the Government for the purchase price so advanced, and the Government may advance him a further sum of £750 for improvements, stock, &c.

8. The first mortgage may be an instalment one for  $36\frac{1}{2}$  years in the case of farms, and  $25\frac{1}{2}$  years in the case of house property, or a flat mortgage may be taken for not longer than