

estates are being acquired at present under the Land for Settlements Act, and new selections have been confined to unselected portions of estates previously acquired, various areas of Crown and national-endowment land, and subdivisions of blocks acquired from the Natives by the Native Land Purchase Board, and opened under the Land Act for public application.

LEGISLATION.

THE following is a brief summary of the legislation affecting the operations of this Department which was passed during the year 1923 :—

Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act, 1923.—This Act comprises two Parts, the first of which provides the machinery necessary for enabling relief to be given to discharged-soldier settlers, and the second contains certain provisions which experience showed to be necessary for the purpose of facilitating the administration of the principal Act. The first Part of the Act authorizes the setting-up of the Discharged Soldiers Dominion Revaluation Board, and of such number of District Revaluation Committees as may be necessary to deal with applications from discharged soldiers for reductions of rent and of mortgages, and for relief with respect to arrears of rent, interest, &c. Any reductions of rent or mortgages are to date from the 1st July, 1921, or the date of lease or license, or of the advance, whichever date is the later.

Rangitaiki Land Drainage Amendment Act, 1923.—The purport of this Act is to increase the number of classes in which lands subject to the principal Act can be classified by the arbitrators for rating purposes, and to authorize reclassification *from time to time* of such lands for such purposes, and the adjustment of rates accordingly.

Finance Act, 1923.—Sections 4 and 5 authorize the Minister of Finance to borrow a further sum not exceeding £50,000 for the purpose of carrying on works under the Hauraki Plains Act, 1908, and a further sum not exceeding £50,000 for the purposes of the Rangitaiki Land Drainage Act, 1910. Section 9 provides that instead of all expenses in connection with the administration of the Scenery Preservation Act, 1908, being paid out of the Consolidated Fund as heretofore, they shall be paid out of moneys to be appropriated by Parliament for such purposes out of the Ordinary Revenue Account of the Consolidated Fund. Provision is also made that any unexpended balances of loan moneys or of revenue received under that Act as on the 1st April, 1924, were to be transferred to the said account.

Reserves and other Lands Disposal and Public Bodies Empowering Act, 1923.—This Act, which contains 111 sections and two schedules, is a series of special enactments, all of which deal with matters of local interest. Fifty-eight of the sections were promoted by Departments of State, the remainder by local authorities and private institutions.

Regulations.—The principal regulations issued during the year were those issued under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, 1915, prescribing forms of applications, valuations, and certificates for the purpose of giving effect to provisions relating to applications for relief from discharged soldiers.

PURCHASE OF LAND FOR SUBDIVISION.

The Department is approached from time to time to purchase estates in favoured localities for subdivision, this, of course, being the function of the Land Purchase Controller under the Land for Settlements Act. Experience has proved that unless lands are acquired for subdivision at a price based on average sheep values, it is not possible to cut up estates into dairy propositions and offer same for selection at suitable rentals. The good lands suitable for dairying in the Dominion are generally firmly held, and it is only possible to acquire same at a price which immediately presents difficulties when subdivision is proceeded with.

The policy of the Department for closer settlement must be on sound lines regarding all purchases for subdivision, and so long as the sheep industry continues in its present flourishing condition it will be well nigh impossible to acquire desirable and suitable lands for closer settlement.

Again, the question of actual subdivision of a property bought at what would appear a reasonable figure presents difficulties as the overhead charges are at once multiplied, and the final result of the subdivision is that it is difficult to maintain the original value as a whole, either in pounds, shillings, and pence, or on carrying-capacity.

LANDS FOR SELECTION.

During the year 593,771 acres were taken up under all tenures by 2,088 selectors, the average holding being about 284 acres. There is a good demand for land in favourably situated localities, but attractive Crown lands are naturally becoming less in area as the settlement of the country progresses.

During the year under review the principal blocks offered were the Waipiro Block, in the Gisborne district, comprising nine sections of a total area of 7,503 acres. There was a good demand for the sections, and the whole of the applicants could not be satisfied. In the Hawke's Bay District 35,435 acres were offered in four pastoral runs, but there was no demand. In the Marlborough District the principal block offered was the Snowflake Run, containing 11,430 acres, and although the run was selected there was no competition. In the Canterbury District one run of 6,061 acres was offered.

Doubtless the most important blocks offered during the year were the pastoral-run subdivisions in the Otago Land District. Six of the subdivisions of the Benmore Runs were offered for license by auction, the area offered being 53,984 acres. Ten subdivisions of the Mount Pisa Block, of a