

793. **The history of land administration in this Dominion leads us to comment on the fact that periods of depression are apt to be looked upon as justifying the granting of considerable concessions to Crown tenants and mortgagors.** We would point to the sum of £7,000,000 written off in terms of the Finance Act, 1927 (No. 2), in respect of the settlement of discharged soldiers, and it is a fact that reductions of a similar nature by revaluation in respect of civilian settlement are by no means uncommon. We therefore preface our report by referring to the effect of the present depression on Crown tenants and mortgagors, and to the possibility of affording adequate relief by some means other than by a permanent revaluation of leaseholds or mortgages. **Undoubtedly, a more efficient and more equitable method of affording relief, consistent with the duty of the State to safeguard the national heritage, must be found.**

794. There can be no question that a depression such as the present does not call for a general writing-down of values of Crown leaseholds and mortgages for all time, more particularly as the capital values of Crown leaseholds are generally on a relatively low scale. **We are of opinion that the power to remit rent or interest is sufficient to enable the State to provide that relief which is necessary to enable settlers to carry on under present conditions.**

795. There is a growing demand for a permanent writing-down of values and mortgage debts owing to the Crown, but it should be borne in mind that Crown tenants in normal times, as a general rule, do not suffer from an oppressive rental burden.

796. **The present machinery of land administration is exceedingly cumbersome and complicated, and this we believe to be due to the fact that land administration has for many years been regarded as almost entirely political.**

797. Notwithstanding that the Land Act was consolidated in 1924—and it was then a complicated measure—amendments have been introduced on various occasions since, and all serve to cloud the issue and to make for difficult administration. It should be possible to simplify the law in regard to Crown and settlement lands, and this should be a first step towards the reorganization of the Department.

ADMINISTRATION.

798. For purposes of local administration there are twelve district offices each under the control of a Commissioner of Crown Lands. The Commissioner is the statutory Chairman of the Land Board in each district, so that there are twelve Land Boards, each consisting of the Commissioner, three Government nominees, and one member elected by the Crown tenants of the district.

799. In addition to Land Boards, the following special Boards also function:—

- (1) The Dominion Land Purchase Board, which controls and carries out negotiations for the purchase of land under the Land for Settlements Act, 1925. This Board is assisted by a local Land Purchase Board in each Island.
- (2) The Dominion Revaluation Board, which deals with applications for revaluation of soldiers' holdings under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act, 1915.
- (3) The central Revaluation Board which deals with applications for revaluation of Crown tenants' holdings under the Land Act, 1924. Subsidiary to this Board are local Revaluation Committees, consisting of the Commissioner of Crown Lands, a District Valuer, and a Government nominee.
- (4) The Lands Development Board, controlling the development of Crown and settlement lands prior to settlement and the making of loans to settlers on land acquired from the Crown. This Board is assisted by twelve advisory committees, each consisting of the Commissioner of Crown Lands for each district and not more than two other persons.
- (5) The Scenery Preservation Board, which deals with the management of scenic reserves and the acquisition and setting-aside of new areas.

800. There is also a departmental committee which advises the Minister of Lands on matters affecting securities for advances under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, 1915.

801. **It will be seen from the foregoing that there is a large number of Boards connected with this Department, and it should be possible to eliminate some of them. The administrative costs connected with approximately forty Boards and Committees must be considerable.**

802. It does not appear that the District Land Boards as at present constituted are the most efficient organizations that could be devised for the administration of Crown lands.

803. In the first place, the Land Boards were constituted for the purpose of controlling and directing the settlement of Crown lands. The activities of the Department have, however, been widened, and they now centre around the management of securities for loans and the expenditure of public money on development schemes.

804. Although the functions of the Department have tended more and more towards finance, the old system of control by Land Boards has continued, and the Boards are now concerned with the management and control of investments of considerable magnitude. **The Department has become a financial institution which demands more rigid control than that provided under the present system.**

805. **We are of opinion that local Land Boards, as such, should be abolished; but, as it is necessary to maintain contact with settlers, we recommend the setting-up of a committee of three persons in each land district for the purpose of controlling routine administration and acting as an advisory body to a central Board in Wellington.** We suggest that the committee should consist of the Commissioner of Crown Lands, the District Valuer, and one member representing the Crown tenants in the district. Such committees would be more economical than the present Land Boards, and would have sufficient local knowledge to consider questions relating to land-settlement.