

806. We also recommend the establishment of a central Board in Wellington in which should be vested most of the powers now vested in the Minister of Lands. The setting-up of such a Board, coupled with the abolition of the Land Boards and the establishment in their place of local Committees, should pave the way to more efficient administration of land-settlement.

807. Reference has been made to the fact that the Department is now largely a financial institution controlling State assets valued at approximately £47,000,000—not far short of the capital invested in the railways. A large part of the assets has been created by the investment of public moneys. We refer particularly to lands and assets financed from the following accounts:—

Land for Settlements Account.  
Hutt Valley Land Settlement Account.  
Native Land Settlement Account.  
Swamp Land Drainage Account.  
Rangitaiki Land Drainage Account.  
Hauraki Plains Settlement Account.  
Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Account.  
General Purposes Relief Account.

808. Out of the total value of over £47,000,000 the invested capital totals £32,764,000. **The sum at stake is so large that the setting-up of one controlling Board is imperative.**

809. **It would be an advantage to the Government to have a strong Board to which could be delegated the duty of carrying out the Government land policy, which should be dictated by well-defined principles and removed entirely from the influence of political expediency.**

#### DEPARTMENTAL ORGANIZATION.

810. The Department is broadly divided into three compartments as follow:—

- (1) Administrative and Clerical.
- (2) Professional—Surveying.
- (3) Technical—Drafting.

811. It is difficult, when considering ways and means of effecting economies, to separate the three compartments, and we do not propose to traverse the duties and responsibilities of each in detail. There is, however, one matter affecting the technical branch to which we shall refer before dealing with general matters affecting all branches.

812. The technical branch is concerned with the general drafting-work of the Department, including city and town maps, cadastral, topographical, road, pictorial, and tourist maps, and with the preparation of tide tables for seven ports in the Dominion. **It seems to us that under present conditions there is no justification for much of the work which is undertaken.** The total number of draftsmen engaged at the present time is 204, and, although the staff has recently been reduced by approximately twenty officers, this reduction does not go far enough, **and a general overhaul of the duties of the technical branch with a view to the elimination or postponement of much of the work of map-drawing is recommended.**

813. The Department has on hand stocks of lithographs to the value of over £50,000, and there is not a ready sale for them. We consider, therefore, that the present stocks should suffice for some years to come and that the drawing of new maps should in general be postponed.

814. In particular, there appears to be little justification for the compilation of city maps to meet only a limited public demand. Furthermore, the cost of preparation and printing is out of all proportion to the return, and, if such maps are required, the preparation thereof should be left to private enterprise.

815. **It should be possible to reduce the personnel of the technical branch by at least fifty officers, representing a saving of approximately £10,000.**

#### GENERAL ADMINISTRATIVE DUTIES.

816. The Department was originally constituted for the purpose of administering the land owned by the Crown—that is, ordinary Crown lands, national-endowment lands, education reserves, and various specific endowments. The whole of this land was not specifically acquired, but is what may be termed the Crown estate in the Dominion, and it is first necessary to consider the position in regard to land of this class.

#### *Crown Lands.*

817. The Land Act, 1924, provides elaborate machinery for the administration of Crown lands, and, as previously stated, it is difficult, without a close study of the Act, to ascertain the powers and duties of the Department and the rights of tenants. We consider that, as most of the Crown tenants now have the right of acquiring the freehold, a simplified Land Act should not be difficult to prepare, and this in itself should make for more economical administration.

818. As to the position of Crown lands, it is interesting to note that these lands, which were acquired by the Crown for very little or no consideration, do not return sufficient to cover the total administrative costs of the Department. There are, of course, certain functions of the Department which do not provide any financial return and which have no direct relation to the rental received from Crown lands, but nevertheless the administrative costs have grown to such an extent that the revenue from ordinary lands is more than absorbed thereby. If, however, an arbitrary charge were made against the revenues from Crown lands merely to cover the cost of collection of rents and direct administrative costs, the surplus of revenue over expenditure is insufficient to meet an interest charge of 4 per cent. on the value of Crown lands. This is exemplified by the following statement for the year ended 31st March, 1931, which shows that the deficiency for the year after charging interest amounted to £55,799.