

one year from date of selection. This was made, I suppose, in the interests of *bonâ fide* settlers; but I am of opinion that it is rather in favour of speculation. Four years is too long to dispense with residence. A *bonâ fide* settler would reside on his section at once, or as soon as possible; but this period of four years enables speculators to take up the land, improve it, and sell it before the expiration of the four years; and I think that it would be to the interest of *bonâ fide* settlement if this period for residence was reduced to, say, two years on bush land, or it might be better if only one year was allowed, for the Board could extend the time on sufficient grounds being shown.

There is one ground of complaint *re* the ballot, and that is that a man may ballot for a number of years, and if not lucky enough to draw a section his time inspecting blocks and expense of travelling is thrown away. I do not think there is much in this, because in nearly all our blocks there are a number of sections not disposed of at ballot, which an unsuccessful applicant can apply for; but he probably will only apply for the fancy sections, and will not take others. If there is anything in such complaint, it might be got over by having portion of a block sold by auction, say, a day after the ballot. In this case, half a block, or any portion decided on, would be open for selection in the usual way, and the remainder sold by auction, the price bid being annual rental. This would give disappointed applicants a chance of getting a section.

Generally, I have found that the present land laws, with the exception of the grouping of sections, work satisfactorily. It is difficult to prevent speculation and dummyism, but I think the amendments I suggest will check them to a large extent.

I have, &c.,

ERIC C. GOLD SMITH,

Commissioner of Crown Lands.

The Surveyor-General, Wellington.

TARANAKI.

Report from JAMES MACKENZIE, Esq., Commissioner of Crown Lands, Taranaki.

Department of Lands and Survey,

District Office, New Plymouth, 30th July, 1903.

I HAVE the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your circular of the 9th instant, and, in reply, have to state that, in my opinion, the real cure for abuses of the ballot is simply that the Land Board should have discretionary power in the selection of applicants; and, as an instance of this, in a ballot held in New Plymouth, just before I came here, for eight sections of good land near Uruti 2,142 applications were put in, and amongst these there were probably not more than eighty *bonâ fide* settlers. The result was that all the sections except one were not allotted to best advantage.

All I can do now is to endeavour to block transfers until residence has been complied with; failing which, to forfeit. But as the law stands at present, even after forfeiture, the chances are that the same trouble will repeat itself.

Regarding the family combinations referred to by the Right Hon. the Premier, these in practice are of two classes. First, the real speculative one, where the rich man on account of unlimited means secures a section and subsequently transfers to a man who starts on his holding with a handicap that he may take with him to his grave and leave as a legacy to his widow. I have met this class of men in Taranaki in real life, but, as a rule, here the Board are ready for him. The other case of family combination, although wrong, is forced on the poorer man by circumstances and the state of the law. A working-man's family want a section; they know well that their only chance is to have as many balls in the ballot-box as their limited means will allow, and father, mother, boys, and girls go in for it, caring not who gets it, so long as one does, for they know that they get a home and a start in life. But the difference between this case and the other is that it is wanted, at any rate, for *bonâ fide* settlement, and the family, if successful, go straight on the land.

It is a means probably that would never be resorted to if the Land Board could examine applicants, for no Board worth its salt would allow a barrister, a city merchant, or a doctor, earning their money in quite a different round of life, to go in the ballot as against a farmer or a bushman; but, as I have said, as the law stands just now the former class can go in by the score, and they have the means to do so, whilst the poorer man is often unable, and he goes on from ballot to ballot, and in the end gets disgusted, and either abandons settlement altogether or buys as a transferee.

Of course, it may be held that section 60 of "The Land Act, 1892," gives the Land Board power to refuse applications; but I think in practice this is seldom applied against the individual, it being looked upon more in the light of a power if for some good reason it is undesirable to part with the land included in any application.

I am therefore of opinion that the ballot, as a ballot, is perfectly fair, but the Board requires power similar—but stronger—to what is given under "The Land for Settlements Act, 1900," to say who are eligible to go into the ballot; and it should be left entirely to the Board's discretion to make the selection among the applicants, and from such decision there should be no appeal.

It might be desirable to procure power to make a special regulation defining the lines on which the selection should be made, such as setting out that persons landless, or unsuccessful at previous ballots, or persons already employed in back districts, or persons accustomed to a country or farming life and likely to make good settlers should have a preference over others; as also restrictions against the members of one family applying for more than one section. I would, however, prefer leaving the whole matter to the discretion of the Land Board.

JAMES MACKENZIE,

Commissioner of Crown Lands.

The Surveyor-General, Wellington.