

accepted in lieu of actual cash. For a really eligible selector the question of deposit does not, as it appears to me, involve any great obstacle. Any difficulty there may be, however, in that way could easily be removed by applying the regulations relating to ordinary Crown lands to all applications.

In balloting for sections it cannot be said that the results generally are such as to give satisfaction, for oftentimes the most undesirable, the least likely to be successful settlers, and the least deserving, obtain the allotments. This, it seems to me, is the most objectionable feature of the ballot system.

To provide an equitable and satisfactory remedy is indeed a difficult problem. The auction and tender systems have been tried and found wanting. The former, by the excitement of competition, inducing competitors to bid unworkable prices or rentals; while under the latter the applicants are left in the dark, and, though not labouring under the same kind of excitement of competition, are, by the impulse of the moment and anxiety to obtain the land, also led to tender more than they can reasonably be expected to pay.

The only alternative that occurs to me is the constitution of a competent Board of Review, before whom all applications and applicants in respect of both ordinary Crown lands and lands under the Land for Settlements Act should be examined and passed, such Board to possess discretionary powers to reject or disqualify all applicants considered incompetent or ineligible, or in any way objectionable, whether by reason of (a) possessing too little means; (b) possessing too much means or being in affluent circumstances; (c) already holding sufficient land; (d) having insufficient knowledge of farming, &c.; (e) other reasons which the Board may deem of such a nature as to justify rejection.

Here I would strongly urge that the Board have power to examine all applicants on oath, and, indeed, that it be made compulsory by law for all applicants for Crown lands to undergo examination on oath as to—

1. Their position financially. It too frequently happens that applicants declare themselves to be possessed of ample means, whereas in fact they have received temporary assistance from loan companies in the shape of donations, which are returned to the companies so soon as the purpose for which the money is required has been served. The Board could make stringent inquiries into matters of this kind, and if the applicant were placed on his (or her) oath the existence of a temporary inflated bank account would be exposed.

2. The amount of land which they already hold, whether freehold, leasehold, or any other tenure of occupancy, and also the amount of land held by the wife or husband of the applicant (as the case might be).

3. Whether, taking the size of the holding into consideration, they have a sufficient knowledge of farming to enable them to work the land to advantage. I personally think it desirable that applicants who have resided in the colony, who know the climatic conditions and the nature of the soil, should have precedence over new arrivals, and it is certainly essential that every applicant should have some knowledge of farming in New Zealand. Here I should like to say that applicants who pass the test, but who are unlucky in several ballots, should have priority accorded them. It must be very disheartening to *bona fide* applicants to find time after time that, through the inevitable caprice of fortune at the ballot-box, they are left out in the cold while some more fortunate individual, trying his luck for the first time, secures a section.

I have also to suggest that, if the scheme of a Board of Review be adopted, that the decision of the Board be final, and that there be no right of appeal from that decision.

With regard to the ballot itself, I think the sections should be offered in groups and subdivisions in the same manner as is now done under the Land for Settlements Act, so as to secure as much uniformity as possible in regard to area, rental, &c. If the applications do not exceed the number of the sections or allotments offered, the order of choice to be decided among the approved applicants by ballot—that is to say, instead of balloting the sections or allotments, the applicants in the order drawn to be allowed to choose the section or allotment desired. If the number of applicants exceeds the number of sections or allotments, the Board to reduce the number in its discretion, having regard to the most eligible and desirable and deserving, to the number required, and then ballot for order of choice in the same manner as in the case where the number of applicants does not exceed the number of sections or allotments.

The Surveyor-General, Wellington.

D. BARRON,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

SOUTHLAND.

REPORT from JOHN HAY, Esq., Commissioner of Crown Lands, Southland.

Department of Lands and Survey,
District Office, Invercargill, 18th August, 1903.

Ballot System.

IN reply to your circular of the 9th ultimo *re* the above, I have to say, in balloting under "The Land Act, 1892," in the usual way, it is often found that the most desirable applicants are not successful, and when a whole family, say, of six, are eligible and apply for a section it goes without saying that they have a very great advantage over the single or individual applicant. I would suggest that, in the case of a whole family wishing to acquire a section, only one member of said family be allowed to apply for that section. By this means only one of a family could compete at the ballot, thereby reducing the inequalities now obtaining and placing all applicants on an equal footing.