

Settlement of the greater part of the area has been delayed for want of surveys, and arrangements have been made to expedite them. This is necessary in order to place the land on the market, and comply with the provisions of the statutes.

RATING ON NATIVE LANDS.

An amendment of the Rating Act is necessary to facilitate the collection of local rates from Native lands, and to provide for the proper enrolment of Native ratepayers. The communistic nature of the bulk of the titles makes the question difficult and complicated. It is hoped that the legislation which will be submitted will remove many of the difficulties.

NATIVE TOWNSHIPS.

The legislation now on the statute-book relating to these was framed at a time when many obstacles stood in the way of forming European settlements in purely Maori districts, such as the King-country, Upper Wanganui, and the East Coast. After much negotiation the Maori owners agreed to cede land for townships, to be administered by the Crown or Maori Land Boards on their behalf. The tenure was leasehold. The growth of settlement in and around the townships established under such system necessitates a change. Many of the Native owners desire to sell, while the tenants desire to purchase. It is therefore proposed to permit arrangements for that purpose to be made either by private sale or through the Crown acquiring. The machinery of the Native Land Act, 1909, will be utilized. An alternative will be suggested to tenants to convert their present leases into Glasgow leases.

OTHER NATIVE MATTERS.

The Government propose to repeal the Thermal Springs District Act, 1908, and, subject to certain conditions, to make lands within that district available under the Native Land Act, 1909. The West Coast Settlement reserves and other Native reserves will also be dealt with.

LAND.

The all-important question of closer settlement of the lands of the Dominion, both private and Crown, has been receiving the closest attention, and the Government will shortly bring down a Land Bill which will, it is believed, be acceptable to a majority of the people of this country and of the members of this House. The special aim of this Bill will be to provide a further and a better means of obtaining land for the people, while the difficult question of tenure will be placed upon a footing which conserves in reasonable degree the rights and interests of both the State and the settlers.

In order to further the main purposes of this Bill, important amendments of the Land Settlement Finance Act of last year will be submitted to you. It is confidently expected that these will extend the scope and make more effective the machinery of the existing legislation.

LAND SETTLEMENT FINANCE ACT.

This Act came into operation on the 1st January, consequently there has been very little time to do much under it. However, there are already several associations under way. Two associations have completed purchases, and a third is just about completed.

It is a measure likely to facilitate the settlement of the lands with a good class of settler, and it is anticipated that when the provisions of the Act become better known many more associations will be formed. In putting the Act into operation several weaknesses have been discovered. One of them is the necessity for the survey of an estate before the Board can consider an application by an association to purchase. At the commencement a simple and inexpensive agreement would, perhaps, meet all requirements, and when the Board has considered this, and expressed its opinion as to whether or not the land is suitable and the price reasonable, a more formal contract could be entered into.