

Prior to the end of the financial year 1918–19 the funds provided by Parliament were rapidly running out, and as the demand for land and houses was so great the Government had to resort to unusual measures to meet the situation. It may be mentioned that when the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, 1915, was passed the sum of £50,000 was raised for the purposes of the Act. The Amendment Act of 1916 increased this amount to £100,000, whilst section 82 of the Finance Act, 1917, further increased it to £500,000. This, however, was found to be insufficient, and section 31 of the Finance Act, 1918, authorized the raising of £1,500,000. Such a sum proved quite inadequate to meet the demand, and the Minister of Finance, acting under the authority conferred by section 110 of the Public Revenues Act, 1910, pledged certain reserve fund securities and applied the proceeds for the purpose of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, whilst other moneys were also provided for this purpose under temporary arrangement. As soon as Parliament met last year the position was placed before it, and the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Loans Act, 1919, validated the previous expenditure and authorized the raising of £12,500,000 for the purpose of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, whilst additional moneys were authorized for the acquisition of land under the Land for Settlements Act, 1908, for disposal to discharged soldiers. This amounted to the sum of £2,000,000 for the year ended 31st March, 1920 (out of which £1,456,403 was spent), £2,000,000 for the year ending 31st March, 1921, and £1,000,000 for each financial year thereafter.

It was considered at the time that these funds would be ample to provide for the requirements of the discharged soldiers until Parliament met this year, but experience showed that the rise in the price of land and houses, coupled with more applications than were anticipated, was more than enough to exhaust the whole of the money authorized. In January of this year, owing to continual heavy demands, it was found that the authorizations would be exhausted before Parliament could meet. The following summary shows how the money had been applied for and authorized: Up to 30th April, 1919, £1,150,000; in May, 1919, £355,392; June, £423,000; July, £785,000; August, £573,000; September, £1,746,000; October, £1,363,000; November, £1,283,000; December, £1,213,000. 1920: January, £809,000; February, £1,082,000; March, £1,373,000. Total from the inception of the system to 31st March, 1920, £12,610,254, the greater part being in the last twelve months. In April of this year the advances authorized amounted to £885,000, and the Government then gave public notice that operations under the Act would have to be restricted in a certain measure until Parliament met again, when further funds will no doubt be provided.

At the 31st March, 1919, a total of 896 soldiers had been settled under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, and 185 had been settled under other Acts, making a gross total of 1,081; whilst 77 members of the Expeditionary Force also held land from the Crown. In addition, advances had been made to 263 soldiers for the purchase of rural holdings, and 529 soldiers had been assisted to purchase dwellings in towns, making a grand total of 1,950. At the 31st March, 1920, 2,463 men had been settled under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement and other Acts, whilst 4,107 men had been granted financial assistance to acquire land or to discharge existing mortgages on land they already held, making a total number of 6,570 discharged soldiers settled and assisted on the land. Furthermore, residents in urban and suburban districts to the number of 6,363 had been assisted to purchase or build dwellings.

It may be added that in addition to placing soldiers on the land in the manner aforesaid the Government also grants loans to them to erect dwellings or improve their farms, buy stock, machinery, &c., and otherwise bring their holdings into a state of productiveness; a total of £1,718,362 having been authorized for this purpose up to the 31st March, 1920.

During the past year £2,352,452 was expended in the purchase of land, &c., under the Land for Settlements Act, as against £645,386 for the preceding year; up to the present an amount of £4,140,758 has been expended on the purchase of land for the settlement of discharged soldiers under the provisions of the Land for Settlements Act.

It will therefore be seen that the Government has done all in its power under the abnormal conditions caused by the return of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force to this Dominion, and it is hoped that by the provision of further funds and the opening of all the available Crown and settlement land the demands of returned soldiers will be largely met and satisfied.

LEGISLATION.

The following is a brief summary of the amendments made last session in the laws which make provision for the settlement of discharged soldiers:—

Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act, 1919.

Section 2 of this Act provides for the resumption of any leased Crown land, settlement land, or other land administered by a Land Board that may be required for the settlement of discharged soldiers. Section 5 enables advances to be made to lessees of any lands, or for the acquisition of the leases of any lands, whether administered by a Land Board or not.

The full benefits obtained under the Act are conferred on the following persons: Members of the New Zealand Army Nursing Service who have served abroad, and persons who have been retained in New Zealand as instructors in military camps.

The concessions obtainable under sections 2 and 3 of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act, 1917, were extended to the following: Returned soldiers with service abroad who have not yet received their discharges, widows of soldiers who have served abroad, and discharged soldiers classed as medically fit for service abroad who have been discharged from camp through no fault of their own.

Other amendments are provided embodying improvements found necessary in the course of experience.