

ACQUISITION OF LAND BY PERSONS OF ENEMY ORIGIN.

Under Part I of the War Legislation and Statute Law Amendment Act, 1918, the Governor-General may grant licenses in writing authorizing persons of enemy origin to acquire land, or any estate or interest in land, in the Dominion.

By a Proclamation appearing in the *New Zealand Gazette* No. 19, of the 23rd February, 1920, the date of the termination of the war with Germany was stated to be the 10th January, 1920. The effect of this Proclamation in regard to land-dealings by alien enemies is that they are now subject to the same provisions in this respect as persons of enemy origin.

Since the War Legislation and Statute Law Amendment Act, 1918, came into force on the 10th December, 1918, 325 applications for licenses have been received. Of these 153 have been granted, 87 refused, and the rest have either lapsed or have been withdrawn as unnecessary.

The licenses granted have been chiefly in connection with mortgage transactions and for the acquisition of town properties for residential purposes.

No licenses have been granted covering rural land unless there were exceptional circumstances surrounding the case, as, for instance, where members of the applicant's family have rendered war services.

STAFF OF THE DEPARTMENT.

Owing to the great expansion of work consequent on the development of discharged soldiers settlement on the land the staff of the Department was considerably strengthened during the year. At the outbreak of war the staff of the Department totalled 572, comprising 506 permanent and 66 temporary officers. This staff was much depleted through officers joining the Forces and other calls upon their services, and at the 31st March, 1919, it had just been restored to its previous strength, the staff then comprising 498 permanent and 82 temporary officers, or a total of 580. During the last twelve months 113 new appointments to the permanent staff were made, including 19 temporary officers made permanent, whilst 71 officers were transferred from other Departments, the balance being cadets, shorthand-typists, or junior officers.

The Department lost the services of 43 permanent officers, who retired on superannuation or else resigned from the Service, whilst 9 officers were transferred to other Departments. At the end of the year the staff of the Department consisted of 586 permanent officers and 88 temporary officers, or a total of 674.

WORK OF THE DEPARTMENT.

It may be well to briefly touch upon the work performed by the staff, which comprises surveyors, draughtsmen, land-drainage engineers and their assistants, computers, clerks, shorthand-typists, machinists, Crown lands rangers, supervisors of soldier settlements, timber-measurers, &c. The Department has to administer the provisions of some fifty to sixty Acts of Parliament, which deal with Crown lands, national endowments, educational endowments, domains, public reserves, cemeteries, and lands specially leased under the Land for Settlements Act and the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act. The operations include the survey and subdivision of land in its virgin state, the survey and subdivision of improved lands purchased from private owners, and the reclamation and drainage of swamps owned by the Crown. When these lands are available for settlement they are then offered for selection or allotted under the provisions of the Land Acts, &c., by the Land Board of the eleven land districts into which the Dominion is divided. After disposal of the lands the necessary titles are prepared, and it is then the duty of the Boards to collect the revenue from the lands disposed of, and to see that the provisions of the Acts relating to residence and improvements, cultivation of the land, &c., are carried out. In addition, as over £15,000,000 has been loaned by the Government under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act to eligible applicants to enable them to acquire freehold farms or to erect houses and improve their holdings, it is necessary to attend to the work in connection therewith, involving the preparation of mortgages and bills of sale, the taking-out of policies of insurance, and the proper registration and dealing with the various securities required. The dealings with stock alone require great care, and are specially dealt with by the supervisors, accountants, &c.; and when it is borne in mind that there are some thirty-five thousand Crown tenants on the books of the Department, whilst another twelve thousand discharged soldiers have had advances made to them through the Department and require to be dealt with in a somewhat similar manner, it will be seen that to safeguard the funds of the State and to ensure that settlement is progressing on satisfactory lines and in a manner in accordance with the law requires the energies of a large staff to carry on the work entrusted to it in an efficient and capable manner. Special attention is drawn to the fact that through the loss of trained officers by death in the Expeditionary Forces or otherwise, and by the great increase of work coming upon the Department immediately after the conclusion of the war, a heavy strain was thrown on all the staff, and it was impossible to get trained officers to take the place of those who had gone. Although the new officers worked to the best of their ability, yet it will be some time before they can take the place of their predecessors and carry on the work without constant supervision. In almost every office the strain has been badly felt, and the circumstances necessitated officers having to work under abnormal conditions, which for the time being imposed a very heavy burden upon them. It is gratifying to relate that in every instance the officers responded to the call to the best of their ability, and too much credit cannot be given to the responsible officers who carried out the work of the Department in a loyal, painstaking, and thorough manner.

WORK DONE FOR OTHER DEPARTMENTS.

The amount of work done by the Department for other Departments of the State is very considerable. All the surveys of Native lands with but few exceptions are let, supervised, and checked by the Department; the surveys of all private lands, subdivisions, townships, &c., are checked prior to the issue of the Land Transfer titles; and these two branches, which are quite unconnected with Crown lands, absorb the work of a large number of specialist officers, as also does the work of checking the plans and documents required for taking lands for any public purpose.

The Department prepares and supplies also a large number of maps required in connection with all the functions of Government, such as public works, statistics, &c., including the census enumeration, which alone requires over half an acre of calico to mount the necessary plans.