

on the 31st March last 3,014 selectors were holding 1,440,343 acres under the Act, whilst a further 1,799 held 1,748,354 acres taken up under the Land Act or other Acts. Owing, however, to the lessening demand for land by discharged soldiers, it has been found necessary to revoke many of the Proclamations setting land aside solely under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, and to reopen the land under the Land Act for application by the general public, discharged soldiers having preference when applying.

Besides those who took up land in this manner many availed themselves of the opportunity of buying land by means of an advance from the Government, and at the end of last year advances had been authorized to 5,443 discharged soldiers to enable them to acquire holdings of their own. As was only to be expected, a very large proportion of soldier applicants desired to acquire or erect residences in towns where their work was, and at the same date authorities had been issued to 10,789 persons for this purpose.

Another phase of the Department's activities was the making of advances on current account for the purchase of stock, machinery, tools, seeds, &c., and for the erection of farm-houses and other buildings. Sums amounting to £3,908,852 have thus been authorized to 9,308 soldiers, most of whom are included in the foregoing figures dealing with soldiers on the land.

These have briefly been the operations under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act. Under the Repatriation Act the Government has assisted returned soldiers in other ways, and it may be noted that up to July last 6,288 soldiers were granted loans to establish themselves in business, while 14,865 received assistance to purchase tools, furniture, &c. A further 7,483 were granted sustenance allowances whilst learning trades or professions; transportation was given to 3,252; and unemployment sustenance was granted to 1,123 others. In addition 27,658 were placed in employment.

Special attention is directed to the fact that those soldiers who purchased town and suburban residential properties have mostly been in a position to meet their obligations. They have, as a rule, been in steady employment, and as their instalments are mostly payable monthly the majority have met their liabilities promptly, and there is no reason to anticipate much loss under this heading. In the course of their work they are frequently compelled to move from one town to another, and before doing so to dispose of the properties acquired under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act. The fact that in most cases of transfer a goodwill has been paid for the property shows that advances were made on good security, the margin of which will increase as the instalments of purchase-money are paid off. In the cases where houses have been obtained, and the Department has had to resell, it has generally been able to do so at a price sufficient to cover the advances. It will be seen, therefore, that the Government's policy of granting loans to soldiers to buy and erect houses in towns and suburban areas has been productive of good results.

LANDS OPENED AND AVAILABLE.

Owing to the restricted demand by discharged soldiers during the year, the area offered for selection showed a considerable reduction compared with the previous year.

An approximate area of 65,000 acres was opened with selection restricted to returned men. The demand was very poor, much of the land offered not being applied for at all, and, in order to prevent as much loss as possible, the bulk of the sections, which had previously been set apart for soldiers only, were opened for general application. Where this was done, preference was always given at the ballot to any discharged soldier who cared to apply.

The principal settlements and blocks which were offered to soldiers only, during the year, were as follows; but in addition to these a large number of scattered sections, totalling some 18,085 acres, were also opened for soldiers:—

North Auckland: Thirteen sections in Motutara Settlement (2,562 acres).

Auckland: Thirteen sections in Reporoa Settlement (3,215 acres); fifteen sections in Hikuai Settlement (2,014 acres); seventeen sections in Orongo Settlement (825 acres).

Hawke's Bay: Three sections in Te Reinga Block (1,599 acres).

Taranaki: Three sections in Katikara Settlement (327 acres).

Wellington: Seven sections in Haunui Settlement No. 2 (347 acres); four sections in Pitt Settlement, and one section in the Waddington Settlement (20 acres); nine sections in Almadale Settlement (670 acres); one section, Pihautea Settlement (47 acres); eight sections in Wanganui River Trust Block (4,008 acres).

Nelson: Eight sections in Matakaitaki Settlement (6,980 acres).

Canterbury: Part of Waitangi Run (21,200 acres).

Otago: Five sections in Kelso Settlement (723 acres); fourteen sections, Pukeawa Settlement (2,737 acres).

It is expected that with reasonable recovery in prices of our farming products the demand for Crown land will again become active; but with the large area now available there should be no difficulty in satisfying the requirements of discharged soldiers who eventually intend to go on the land. The opening of several large runs is being postponed until conditions are more favourable.

Details of the lands allotted are set out in Table 2 appended. Summarized, the result is that during the year 394 holdings, totalling 97,888 acres, were allotted on ordinary and special tenure. The total area set apart for selection by discharged soldiers as at the 31st March, 1922, was 1,367,761 acres. Owing to the decision to open for general application lands for which soldiers had not applied, it was necessary to issue during the year Proclamations revoking the setting-apart of a total area of 101,956 acres of Crown, settlement, and national-endowment lands.

At the present time there are 165 sections available for immediate selection by discharged soldiers, the total area being 24,059 acres. In addition to this there are 427,772 acres of Crown and settlement lands open, and discharged soldiers will have preference in every case where they care to apply.