

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE DOMINION REVALUATION BOARD.

THE DISCHARGED SOLDIERS SETTLEMENT AMENDMENT ACT, 1923.

REVALUATION OF SOLDIER FARMS.

THE personnel of the Dominion Revaluation Board set up to deal with the revaluation of soldier farms and cognate matters in relation thereto is as follows: Messrs. J. B. Thompson, Under-Secretary for Lands (Chairman); R. A. Rodger; J. Gordon; F. W. Flanagan, Valuer-General; and J. H. Richardson, C.M.G. In addition thereto, some twenty-four District Revaluation Committees were appointed to inspect and supply reports on the several farms, &c., for which an application for revaluation had been lodged. The District Committees completed their labours in due course, and an acknowledgment is due them for the very thorough, capable, and sympathetic manner in which their onerous duties were performed.

As regards the work of the Dominion Revaluation Board, it has now completed its duties as defined in the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act, 1923. All applications for revaluation have now received consideration, and determinations have been issued after a careful review of each individual case.

It could not be expected that the original determinations would always prove acceptable to the settler, and a fair number of appeals were submitted for reconsideration, not only of land-values, but also of other matters affecting the settlers' financial position. These have received most careful attention, and no case has been disposed of without much deliberation and inquiry. Certain appeals are still being dealt with.

In the matter of appeals—although these were not welcomed by the Board—every opportunity was given the soldier settler to state his particular disability, either by personal interview or deputy, or simply by correspondence. The Board never at any time adopted any hard-and-fast rule as to reappraisal, and when cases were submitted for review no trouble was spared in order to place the Board in full possession of all outstanding facts and features regarding each appeal, so that it could intelligently deal with same in a manner giving each settler every concession in reason to enable him to carry on successfully. To this end, every possible means of further investigation were used: check values were obtained, reports were drawn from various sources, and in many cases the Board made personal investigation by visiting settlements and holdings where there was evidence of special difficulties entailing special consideration. As a result of the Board's attitude in this connection a far better understanding with the soldier settler has been arrived at.

Meetings of the Board have also been held at many centres, and consultations with District Committees arranged where possible.

The Board considers that the chances of success of the soldier settlers have been substantially improved; but it is inevitable, owing to the personal equation, that certain men will drop out from time to time.

Apart altogether from its statutory authorities and powers, the Board has been able to make many useful and helpful recommendations for the further relief of the soldier settler, and it is gratifying to find that the several Land Boards have been most generous in making the Dominion Board's recommendations substantial and effective. The Land Boards also fully appreciate the necessity of extending relief over and above that coming directly within the Dominion Board's authority.

Quite a measure of success has been met with in obtaining a substantial reduction of the outside liabilities of the soldier settlers, and the purchase of mortgages subsequent to the Crown's has received much attention. The Board has, in negotiating for same, had to place itself in the position of an investing body; and, as obviously a margin was necessary, it could not see its way in many cases to purchase mortgages which, when added to the Crown's prior charges, would represent a 100-per-cent. investment.

Further legislation under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, 1924, was introduced last session tending to the additional strengthening of the soldier settlers' position, the main provisions authorizing a review of the Current Accounts and a readjustment of original building instalments. The authority to deal with these matters is delegated to the Dominion Board, and it is now about to undertake this duty. Some idea of the volume of the work entailed may be appreciated when it is stated that the Current Accounts number approximately ten thousand. Power is given to write off, reduce, or place to a Suspense Account any amounts in doubt. Original buildings—repayable by instalments—where too highly valued, may, upon the recommendation of the Dominion Board, be reduced in value by the Hon. Minister of Lands, and the term of repayment extended under the same conditions. Much relief will in this way be afforded, and fictitious securities brought down to their true value.