

REPORT OF CHAIRMAN OF THE DOMINION REVALUATION BOARD.

THE DISCHARGED SOLDIERS SETTLEMENT AMENDMENT ACTS, 1923 AND 1924.

REVALUATION OF SOLDIER SETTLERS' FARMS, AND INVESTIGATION OF CURRENT ACCOUNT ADVANCES.

As indicated in last year's report, the Dominion Revaluation Board has completed the major duties delegated to it under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Acts, 1923 and 1924, but during the past year it has been concerned with revisions of some of its previous determinations in cases where it has been found that settlers were still unable to carry on even with adjusted charges based on former valuations.

It has been found in some cases where arrears were postponed for a period of years at time of revaluation in 1924 that the settler has no prospect of being able to overtake these accrued charges, and it has been considered necessary to remit the postponed amounts to give the settler a chance to continue in occupation of his holding and to assist him in his endeavour to achieve ultimate success. As far as arrears accrued later than 30th June, 1923, are concerned, recommendations for remission, where justified, have been made to the District Land Boards, and where these have been given effect to the benefits therefrom to the settler, and to the Department in the improved security, are apparent. In this connection satisfactory results have been achieved by the remission of portion of the annual charges for one or two years as they fall due, conditionally on improvements being effected to a value equalling the amount of the remission. Such improvements are to assist the development of the properties up to their maximum carrying-capacity, and the work is carried out under the supervision of the Field Inspectors. It is considered that a judicious expenditure for lime and fertilizers over a period of years will enable many of the settlers to get the maximum returns from the better portions of their farms and thereby ensure their ability to meet their commitments in full.

The past year's operations of the Board have been instrumental in placing on a good footing for the future men who have been endeavouring to farm overcharged properties. There has been a marked decrease in the number of abandoned farms thrown back on to the hands of the Department; and here it may be remarked that in many cases were it not for the existence of the Dominion Revaluation Board, and its powers, Land Boards would be faced with the alternative of forfeiture or foreclosure, as the case might be. It will be appreciated that the loss which would have to be faced by the Government in the case of abandonment of holdings is considerably greater than that caused through reduction in charges by the Board. Each case has been taken individually and dealt with on its merits, resulting in a decision calculated to afford the greatest possible relief and to ensure more production.

The assistance rendered by private mortgagees in discharging or considerably reducing encumbrances to their present-day worth—in certain cases as a result of negotiations entered into by the Board—must not be overlooked. The benefits accruing to the mortgagors in this respect, are to be measured in no small degree, as without the removal of encumbrances registered subsequent to the Crown's security reductions by the Board in some cases would not have been possible. Barriers have accordingly been removed which would otherwise have permanently crippled the settlers in their efforts to obtain a living from over-encumbered properties.

The Board's opinion is that the majority of soldier settlers are now on a stable footing, and that there is a reasonable prospect of their being able to discharge their responsibilities to the Department and meet their commitments in full in the future. A pleasing result of the Board's work is evidenced in the fresh heart taken by the settlers concerned, which is reflected in the increased energies thrown by them into the working of their farms. The value of such encouragement cannot be overestimated as regards the place it occupies in the establishment of the successful settler. Letters of appreciation from the settlers have been received from time to time, which in their turn have heartened the Board. An increasing measure of contentment with their conditions is noticeable in the soldier settlers assisted, and the relations between Department and settler have been correspondingly improved. The men, it is pleasing to report, are, with a few inevitable exceptions, genuine triers.

A number of postponements which were made at commencement of revaluation for a period of five years fall due in July of this year, and it is anticipated in many cases that payment of these accrued charges will be made, indicating the improved position of the settler as compared with that in 1923 or 1924. In some cases the difficulty has been the smallness of area, in which instances reduction in capital value would have afforded only temporary relief. Where possible, additional areas have been secured for the settlers concerned, and it is believed that with the increased area at their disposal the men will eventually make good.

Once again the Board has to record its appreciation of the work done by the various District Land Offices in the compilation of reports and other information to assist the Board in its deliberations. These have been framed in such a way as to enable the Board without much difficulty to view the whole position in each case, and to determine just what assistance is warranted and necessary in the face of the situation as disclosed.

As indicated in last year's report, the Board has this year, too, carried on its functions at an absolute minimum of cost and staff.

The schedules here following show the operations of the Board on the various accounts as at the 31st March, 1928.

J. B. THOMPSON, Chairman.