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Reparoa Estate.

Sections Without Ballot.

ALLEGED USE OF INFLUENCE.

Denial By The Minister.

The following information is contained in a circular from the Auckland Returned Soldiers' Association under the title of: "The Truth about Reparoa."

The complaint made by the Auckland Returned Soldiers' Association about the allotment of two sections of the Reparoa Estate without a ballot, has not been very long in coming before Parliament. The subject was first introduced by Mr W. E. Perry (Auckland Central), who placed a question bearing upon it on the Order Paper last week. Subsequently Mr H. Poland (Ohiemuri) made the same matter the subject of a question to the Minister for Lands, asked without notice. Mr Poland said that in common with other members he had received a communication from the association which recited the facts, stated that the reply of the Minister was considered very unsatisfactory, and suggested that political influence might have been at work in effecting the allotment of the land without a ballot. The letter said that in view of the fact that this was not the first case where men had been singled out, there was a strong feeling that the selection of these two men was due to political influence.

The Hon. D. H. Guthrie said he had no hesitation in answering the question straight away. He took great exception to the allegation of political influence. Since the beginning of the scheme there had not been one case, so far as he was aware, in which political action had been used in the settlement of soldiers. Everything that had been done had been straight, square, and above board. Exception had been taken in one or two cases, but the explanation had been accepted. The Reparoa Estate consisted of land of a peculiar kind, needing special knowledge. The two men to whom the sections had been allotted had received a special recommendation from Mr H. E. Vaile, among others. They knew the district, and had been working this class of land for some time. It was suggested that they should be secured for the estate, in order that their knowledge might be used for the benefit of the district. Personally he had known nothing of the matter until it was done, and he felt keenly and resented keenly the allegation of political influence.

Mr Poland: It is not made against you.

Mr Guthrie: It is against the Department, and I resent it. He was prepared to back up the action of the board, continued Mr Guthrie. If there had been a weak board and a weak Minister the matter might have been rescinded, but as it was the two men would be retained, and would be of use to the district.

This criticism came only from a section of the returned soldiers; continued the Minister. It was not from the New Zealand Association in any case, but from the Auckland Association.

Mr Poland: They are a big body.

Mr Guthrie: Between 12,000 and 13,000 men, I believe, but this does not come from the whole of them.

Mr Poland: It is from the executive.

Mr V. H. Potter (Roskill): From some of the executive.

Mr Guthrie repeated that there was no political influence used in the case quoted. He was very glad, he said, that the question had been asked, in order that he might have a chance to answer it, especially as the letter had been sent broadcast. There had been absolutely no favouritism. The board might have been right or wrong, but it had acted for what it thought was the best. Many people knew the peculiar nature of the land, and it was because of this peculiarity that the men had been secured for the district.

Mr Perry then asked the Minister if he was prepared to accept the secretary of the Auckland Returned Soldiers' Association as being truly representative of the association. Were they to take it from his answer that he did not recognise Mr Andrews as being truly the secretary of the Auckland Returned Soldiers' Association? Did he not think the precedent established by the allotment of these sections was a dangerous one, and would he not prevent a repetition of this incident taking place?

Mr Guthrie said he did recognise Mr Andrews as the secretary of the asso-

ciation but while it might consist of between 12,000 and 13,000 members, he was informed that the meetings were generally attended and the business transacted by about 200. He did not question the right but he did question its right to level such of the association to send out the letter, a charge against the Department, and always would do so.

THE REPAROA ESTATE.

UNBALLOTTED SECTIONS.

MINISTER AND SOLDIERS.

AN AUCKLAND OPINION.

The statement made by the Hon. D. H. Guthrie, Minister for Lands, in the House of Representatives last week, in replying to questions regarding the Auckland Returned Soldiers' Association's complaint about the allotment of two sections of the Reparoa Estate without a ballot, was referred to by the secretary of the association, Mr E. F. Andrews. In reference to Mr Guthrie's denial that political influence might have been at work in effecting the allotment of the land without a ballot, Mr Andrews said that in the letter which, as secretary of the association, he had forwarded to the Minister, no charge had been made, but it was stated that there was a strong feeling among returned soldiers that the allotment of the sections had been due to political influence.

During the past week, said Mr Andrews, he had had, on the average, thirty returned men daily to see him on this question. He denied the accuracy of Mr Guthrie's statement that in the only two previous cases in which exception had been taken to the operation of the scheme the Department's explanation had been accepted. The Minister had stated that the two men who were allotted the sections had special recommendations from Mr H. E. Vaile, the reason given for allotting them the sections being that the Reparoa Estate consisted of land of a peculiar kind needing special knowledge. There were not less than 1500 returned soldiers on the look-out for land, but were the two men who had been given preference, he asked, the only men out of that number who had the special knowledge to deal with that class of land? If that were so, was it fair to place on this block parts of which were much inferior land to the sections already allotted, men who had not the special knowledge necessary before they could hope for success? It certainly seemed bad business on the part of the Government to purchase this estate if Mr Guthrie's contention were correct. If Mr Vaile considered these men specially suited, the Department evidently agreed with him, Mr Andrews asked why the men had not taken up sections of Mr Vaile's land in the vicinity, under clause 2 of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act. Had this been done, there would have been no cause for complaint. The association's point was that when estates were purchased for soldier settlement every returned soldier likely to make settler should have equal opportunities for acquiring them.

Referring to the Minister's assertion that the business of the association was transacted by about 200 out the membership of 12,000, Mr Andrews suggested that this was incorrect, as meetings where the attendance was in the vicinity of 800 to 1000 had been held during the last 12 months. Ninety per cent. of the returned men in the Dominion were also fully opposed to the allotment without a ballot of some of the best sections in estates purchased.

Mr Guthrie had also stated that if there had been a weak board and a weak Minister the matter might have been rescinded. "I appeal to Mr Guthrie," concluded Mr Andrews, "to show the country that he is a strong man, by having a searching inquiry made into this matter, when I am sure he will find that a mistake has been made, and will have the matter reviewed."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

REPAROA ESTATE.

Sir,—It is only fair to point out that this property was acquired 15 months

ago, since when the Department has persistently neglected to throw it open for settlement, and it is even stated that a large part of it has been leased for grazing. Every section would have been taken up, and some of the waiting applicants made such a fuss that at last two soldiers were allowed to settle upon it. Of all departments, the Lands Department seems the most hopelessly fossilised, and it is high time that 75 per cent. of its officers were sacked and replaced by men with some slight rudimentary knowledge of land and how it should be dealt with.—I am, etc., H. E. VAILE.

COPY OF LETTER FORWARDED TO ALL MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT REPRESENTING CONSTITUENCIES IN THE AUCKLAND PROVINCE AND ALSO TO ALL SOLDIER MEMBERS.

REPAROA ESTATE.

Sir,—With further reference to above subject, I am enclosing for your information copy of a letter which appeared in the "N.Z. Herald" of August 2nd. You will observe that Mr Vaile does not support the Minister's statement regarding the reason for the preferential allotment of the two sections.

With regard to the Minister's statement that the letter from this Association did not reflect the true opinion of the returned soldiers as it only came from the A.R.S.A., I beg to inform you that our action in sending the letter in question has already received the endorsement of both the Auckland Provincial and the Dominion Executive.—Yours faithfully, E. F. ANDREWS, Secretary.

STOCK FOR SOLDIERS.

GOVERNMENT PAYMENTS.

COMPLAINTS OF DELAY.

REPLY BY COMMISSIONER.

About 40 soldiers gathered at the Hobson County chambers, Dargaville, last Saturday evening to meet the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Mr R. P. Greville. The commissioner explained that he wished to let them know the position regarding stock transactions, with particular reference to the recent agitation of the Stock Agents and Auctioneers' Association. He quoted figures which he had obtained from the various companies that had been financing soldiers, and gave the total in round figures as £12,000 at present owing to these companies.

"Now," said the commissioner, "are any of these companies afraid of their money? Do they really fear that the New Zealand Government is not good enough for £12,000?"

"No," he replied to his own question. "It is merely a question of interest on their money." The commissioner proceeded to state that he did not think the directors of the companies had countenanced this agitation over a few paltry hundred pounds' interest. He then read a list of the directors of a farmers' co-operative, and said any of those directors could, and if need be would, finance the soldiers had made, those present among transactions and would not expect any interest.

The commissioner proceeded to say that when they considered the sacrifice that the soldiers had made those present among many others, they could not speak of the present agitation without emotion. He had now made an offer which the various companies had accepted. He had undertaken that his Department would pay out within 14 days after receipt of the certified schedule of stock. He further stated in answer to a question that his Department would accept the valuation of any reputable person.

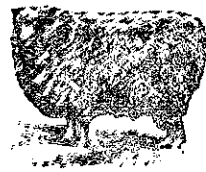
It was suggested at the meeting that the Returned Soldiers' Association should at once submit a list of valuers for approval. The commissioner stated that there was no necessity for soldiers to buy their stock through the various companies. They could deal privately and he suggested that the local Returned Soldiers' Association should form a stock committee for the purpose of assisting their members in fulfilling their requirements. The commissioner went on to say that the stock agents obtained 5 per cent. commission on the sales and 8 per cent. interest on the money.

In answer to a question as to the policy of the Department respecting gum-bearing lands, the commissioner stated that it was proposed to grant licenses for three-acre parcels on a 10 per cent. royalty basis. The licensees would have the right to erect gum-washing plants if they wished, the only stipulation being that the holes should be filled in. These licenses would be available for naturalised Dalmatians. He was having surveys made almost immediately.

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