**DISCHARGED SOLDIERS SETTLEMENT ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1918**

**House of Assembly, 19 November 1918, pages1379-82**

Second reading

**The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS (Hon. E. A. Anstey**)— This is a non-contentious measure, but is very important from the point of settling returned soldiers on the land. The object of this Bill is to amend the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act passed last year in certain respects which experience in the administration of the Act, and the difficulties encountered in procuring land for discharged soldiers and settling them on the land, has shown to be desirable. All the important amendments have been approved, and are recommended by the Discharged Soldiers Land Settlement Com­mittee. The other amendments are either consequential in character or are of a legal nature, and necessary to authorise certain proceedings of the Repatriation Department which it has been absolutely necessary, in the interests of the settlement of soldiers on the land, for the department to take. Clause 3 provides for repealing section 8 of the principal Act, which enacts that land shall not be set apart or acquired for the settlement of discharged soldiers unless the Governor is satisfied, by the report of an officer of the Public Service appointed by the Minister of Repatriation, that the land to be set apart or acquired is suitable for the settlement of discharged soldiers. This section is unnecessary, in view of the provision made by clause 11 of the Bill, which provides that no land is to be set apart or acquired for soldiers except on the recommendation of the Land Board. We are now reconstituting the Land Board, and have called for applicants for two members, one to be chairman of the Land Board and a member of the Pastoral Board, and the other to be a member of the Land Board; thus making the membership of the Land Board four instead of three. In addition one of the amendments of the present Bill provides that the inspector of land in the Repatriation Department in conjunction with two members of the Land Board shall make the valuations, inspections, and sub-divisions, and report on all land purchased for the settlement of soldiers. Section 8 of the original Act will not now be necessary as the Land Board as reconstituted, will make these valuations and reports. Probably the recommendation of the Public Service Commissioner of the members of the Board will be submitted to Cabinet on Monday. Clause 4 provides for an amendment of subsection (1) of section 9 of the principal Act, which will make it unnecessary for land acquired for the settlement of soldiers to be subdivided into blocks if the Land Board is of opinion that the land is only sufficient for a single holding. Clause 5 amends the provision of the principal Act, which applies to returned soldiers farming land on shares under agreement. All such soldiers can, at present, get advances to assist them in their share-farming. Clause 5 provides that only soldiers with share-farming agreements having at least three years to run are to be eligible for advances. There is difficulty with a number of men returning to find sufficient land, particularly for mixed farming propositions, to settle the whole of the eligible men, apart from those being trained. Many of the applicants are young men who were 18 when they enlisted, and they have spent two or three years at the front. Although they may have a fair amount of experience, it is only reasonable that they should wait and take up share-farming agreements rather than that a married man with a family should wait. Clause 6 provides for an amendment of section 12 of the principal Act, which authorises the Minister to remit rent or purchase-money payable by a discharged soldier who holds a lease or agreement under the principal Act. There is, however, no power of remission where the lease is under the Crown Lands Act or the Irrigation and Reclaimed Lands Act. Clause 6 therefore extends the power of remission to eases of discharged soldiers holding leases under either of the Acts just mentioned. Clauses 7 to 10 inclusive are important. They confer on the Land Board compulsory powers of summoning witnesses and compelling answers to questions put for the purpose of assisting the board in carrying out its duties under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Acts. The powers are analagous to those possessed by the Railways Standing Committee and by Royal Commissions.

Mr. Tossell—You are going to make other people make the valuation.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS —The board will have power to call witnesses. There is a general feeling that no valuator, however good, is familiar with land values all over the State. The Land Board will have power to go to a land owner and ask, him his opinion of a certain section.

Mr. Tossell—It is an exhibition of weakness on the part of the Board.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS I do not agree with the honorable member.

We have had excellent land valuators, but I doubt if any man could go to every part of the country and value the land. He has not the necessary local knowledge, and if the Land Board can get that local knowledge, even by compulsion, they have a right to get it. It is considered very desirable that the Land Board should have this power, in order to obtain information from local people with competent knowledge as to the value of land in the neighborhood which may be required for the settlement of discharged soldiers. It is considered that the mere fact of the Land Board possessing power to compel answers to questions will be sufficient to enable the Board to procure all necessary information without it being necessary for the Board to exercise its power of summons, or to invoke the aid of the courts to punish recalcitrant witnesses. Clause 11 is intended to be in substitution for section 8 of the principal Act. It provides that land is not to be set apart or acquired for the settlement of soldiers, except on the recommendation of the Land Board, and every recommendation is to be concurred by the Inspector of Lands in the department of the Minister of Agriculture, and at least two other members of the Land Board. Clause 12 deals with cases where shearing shed, butter factory, fruit-packing shed, or the like has been erected or purchased by the Minister of Repatriation for the use of soldier settlers on co-operative principles. It is proposed that the cost of such sheds and factories should be distributed proportionately amongst the various blocks in proportion to the benefit derived by the blockholder through having the use of the shed or factory.

Mr. O’Flaherty—That is separate and apart from loans to producers.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS —Yes. This will apply in cases, for example, like the Hummocks Station, which was purchased by the Government, and on which there is a very fine shearing shed near the homestead. We have in mind making it a co-operative shearing shed for the settlers on the Hummocks land.

Mr. Tossell—Who is to be the caretaker?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS —I cannot answer that straight out. If it is to be a co-operative concern, the co-operative company will provide its own caretaker; but the point mentioned in the clause is that the cost or value of that particular utility will be proportionately spread over the whole of the blocks.

Mr. 0 ’Flaherty — Is the co-operative society to be registered under the Industrial and Prudent Societies Act or under the Companies Act ?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS —We shall not make provision for that in this Bill. We are only concerned with the point that, in purchasing estates, there are such improvements as a shearing shed, a packing shed, or a butter factory. We purchase such improvements, but no one settler will get the benefit of them as against another, nor will any one settler have to pay the cost of them. That cost will be spread proportionately over the whole of the blockers, and if they form a co-operative society, they will do it under the existing legislation.

Mr. O ’Flaherty—But they could register it under the Companies Act, and then the whole thing could become the property of one man, who would reap the benefit of what you propose to do, whereas if the co-operative society were registered under the Industrial and Prudent Societies Act that could not be done.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS —If it were registered under the Companies Act it would not be a co-operative society.

Mr. O ’Flaherty—They would start off all right, but one man could take it in the finish.

Mr. Tossell—The regulations would deal with that.

Mr. O’Connor—And the articles of association, too.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS —Provision will be made that no one man can become the owner of any of these co-operative utilities, but this is not the Bill in which to place such a provision. We have full powers under existing legislation. Indeed, we are establishing co-operative concerns on the Murray.

Mr. O ’Flaherty—I like the way that you say "we' are.” You mean in two or three years’ time?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS —Surely the honorable member does not want us to put up a packing or a drying shed where there are only a few settlers. In such a case we shall have to meet their disabilities as far as we can until there are sufficient settlers to make the think a success.

Mr. O’Flaherty—You mean “we will”

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS —I mean “we are.” Coming back to clause 12, the enhanced value which ought to be placed on the land is to be assessed in each case by the Land Board, and the purchase price or annual rent of every block within the area benefited is to be increased accordingly. Hence it will be possible to provide for the cost of the shearing shed on the Hummocks Station, which has lately been acquired by the Government for the settlement of returned soldiers, and it will not be necessary to dismantle the fine building and the plant used in connection therewith. Clause 13 requires that the Inspector of Lands in the Department of Agriculture (i.e., in the Repatriation Department) shall be an additional member of the Land Board when the board is dealing with questions relating to soldiers settlements, in the same way as the Director of Irrigation is a member of the Land Board when the board is dealing with matters relating to irrigation blocks. Clause 14 authorises the Minister of Repatriation to enter into contracts, agreements in his corporate name, and to take mortgages and bills of sale, &c. These powers are necessary, as it is necessary for the Minister of Repatriation to take mortgages and bills of sale as a security for advances made to discharged soldiers, and to enter into agreements with discharged soldiers in some cases, and it is very desirable that the Minister should not be bound to execute the necessary documents in his personal capacity. Clause 15 authorises the Minister to purchase a block of land with a view to allotting the same to a particular discharged soldier. It has been the practice for some time for the Repatriation Department to do this, and then either to sell the land to the soldier outright under agreement to purchase, or to vest the land in the discharged soldier and allow the Minister to take a mortgage for the purchase money. Clause 16 authorises the Minister to establish training farms to enable dis­charged soldiers to acquire the knowledge requisite for agricultural, horticultural, viticultural, or dairying pursuits, pig-raising, or poultry-farming, and to test their aptitude therefor. Training farms have already been established, but there has hitherto been no express power to establish such farms. Clause 17 makes provision for the control and management of co-operative factories, shearing sheds, &c., erected or purchased by the Minister. They are to be managed and controlled by a committee appointed by the soldier settlers in the neighborhood. If no such committee is appointed, the Minister may himself appoint a committee of management. Clause 18 requires that before a block can be finally allotted to a soldier on lease or agreement, the soldier must have occupied the block on permit for at least 12 months, as a probationary period, and to give the department an opportunity of determining whether he is likely to prove a good settler. This is the present practice, and the system has worked well. Clause 19 gives power to dispose of surplus land and other land which is not required for soldiers’ settlements, or is not so suitable for soldiers’ settlements as other land for which it might be exchanged. The power is similar to that vested in the Railways Commissioner and the Harbors Board under their respective Acts. The remainder of the Bill, namely, clauses 20, 21, and 22, are merely machinery provisions. I move the second reading.

Mr. GUNN secured the adjournment of the debate until November 21.