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'Proof of Gratitude? ¹⁴¹/₆₀₅₉
Soldier Land Settlement in New Zealand
After World War I'

Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History
at Massey University.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of soldier land settlement in New Zealand after World War I. Entrenched in New Zealand folklore and historiography is the belief that the majority of soldier settlers failed and walked off their farms. This thesis, however, questions this orthodoxy and presents evidence showing that significant aspects of the soldier settlers' story have, for ideological and political reasons, been misunderstood and misrepresented by later writers who have been blinkered to the achievements of the Reform Government. Closely tied to this traditional notion of failure are assumptions about the high cost and poor quality of land involved, and the inexperience and under-capitalisation of the settlers. This study pays particular attention to the development and implementation of government policy. It shows that land purchase and its distribution, and on-going support for settlers by the Government, were based on more sophisticated and discerning policies than later writers have allowed. This study examines the expectations of the primary parties in the settlement process and shows how these expectations were both perceived and presented in the media as unfulfilled. More soldiers survived on their farms than is generally recognised. This was the result of deliberate government policy in response to uncertain economic conditions during the interwar period. This survival rate was not without cost, both in economic terms for the Crown, and in personal terms for the participating soldiers. The farming experience of the interwar period was not as the soldiers expected - faced as they were with a loss of individual freedom and the development of financial dependency. The dominating image to have survived in the historical orthodoxy is that the soldiers were betrayed. This was based upon the strength of their moral claims to recognition and recompense from the community which they had defended. However, this thesis argues that any betrayal was actually of the Arcadian expectations with which the soldiers had returned to New Zealand, and of the heady expectations that the community initially had of the soldiers. These hopes and ideals, it is suggested, proved to be irreconcilable with contemporary political and economic realities. The perceived experience of the soldiers nevertheless assured them their status as victims.

"Get back on the land". That was the slogan which greeted the soldier on his return to New Zealand. The Government made obedience easy and the soldier obeyed with a gratifying enthusiasm. Most likely he was impelled by the bright prospects of prosperity and of a desire for a continuation of the open life.

Quick March, 10 January 1922, p.30.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AJHR</i>	Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives.
L&S	Department of Lands and Survey.
NA	The National Archives of New Zealand.
<i>NZPD</i>	New Zealand Parliamentary Debates.
RSA	New Zealand Returned Soldiers' Association.
WTU	Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

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INTRODUCTION

And through some mooned Valhalla there will pass
Battalions and battalions, scarred from hell;
The unreturning army that was youth;
The legions who have suffered and are dust.

Siegfried Sassoon
From "Prelude: The Troops"¹

But what of the troops who survived and returned 'home'? Did their experience of hell finish with the last shot? It was said that nations quickly discovered it was easier to make war than peace,² and that governments generally failed to comprehend the magnitude of their responsibilities towards veterans after the war.³ In the case of New Zealand's World War I veterans, we are led to believe that an unthankful country and government failed to deliver, in the often quoted phrase of David Lloyd George, 'a land fit for heroes to live in'. We were good at erecting memorials to the fallen but were remiss in our treatment of the ill, the maimed, and the 'able-bodied' veterans.⁴

In his reflective piece on the social history of the American soldier, Richard Kohn listed as one of his three potential categories of research, the interaction between

¹ Siegfried Sassoon, *The War Poems*, arranged and introduced by Rubert Hart-Davis, London, 1983, p.104.

² Report of the Canadian Cabinet Repatriation Committee, 1918, quoted in Desmond Morton and Glenn Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915-1930*, Toronto, 1987, p.108.

³ Stephen R. Ward, (ed.), *The War Generation: Veterans of the First World War*, Port Washington, 1975, p.7.

⁴ For New Zealand War memorials see Chris Maclean and Jock Phillips, *The Sorrow and the Pride: New Zealand War Memorials*, Wellington, 1990. It is unlikely that any soldier who had been involved in combat in World War I returned with a truly 'able body' after the privations of poor food, inadequate hygiene, and exposure to climatic conditions injurious to health.

those who served and those who did not.⁵ He suggested that the reincorporation of the veterans into society over time has helped shape American society, particularly in areas of land grants, pensions, special education programmes, and employment opportunities. A major study on the reincorporation of Canadian veterans has shown that the development of programmes based on the needs of the veterans laid the foundation for the welfare state in Canada. This Canadian study has also shown that the popular image of the 'shabby indifference' with which the veterans were treated is not substantiated by critical enquiry, despite the eventual demise of rehabilitation programmes in the face of the economic problems of the 1920s and 1930s.⁶ J.M. Powell, in a comparative article on soldier settlement schemes in New Zealand, Australia, and Canada has observed:

In each of the Dominions these settlers were accurately portrayed as conscripts for rehabilitation, victims of a patriotic but misdirected effort for increased production which had shown the same kind of incompetence and lack of vision in the upper echelon as they found, to their considerable cost, in the great war itself.⁷

This thesis incorporates Kohn's suggested framework and is an enquiry both into the land settlement aspect of the New Zealand repatriation programme for soldiers after World War I, and a commentary upon the development of an historiography which has made it notorious. The study will focus primarily upon the relationship between the returned soldiers and the Crown, but it will also attempt to analyse the contribution of the community in creating the soldiers' expectations of the scheme, and the resulting formulation of government policy. It will critically question New Zealand's version of 'shabby indifference' and determine if Powell's commentary on World War I soldier settlement schemes is valid in the New Zealand context. This study questions the orthodoxy by using fresh archival material, interwoven with the Annual Reports of the Department of Lands and Survey. It will be shown

⁵ Richard L. Kohn, 'The Social History of the American Soldier: Review and Prospects for Research', *American Historical Review*, 86(3), 1981, p.566.

⁶ Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, pp.222-225.

⁷ J.M. Powell, 'The Debt of Honour: Soldier Settlement in the Dominions, 1915-1940', *Journal of Australian Studies*, June 1981, p.87.

that the land settlement scheme was the response to a series of unprecedented events and that it cannot be judged in the simple cost-accounting terminology of profit and loss, success or failure. The scheme, and the soldiers it assisted, deserves to be viewed in terms of the effort, purpose, and will which motivated the major players in the drama. My research indicates that a larger number of soldier settlers than is generally admitted survived on their properties through two depressions. This suggests that an analysis of the scheme from a new perspective, avoiding the automatic assumption of failure of the Reform Government's policies, will prove fruitful in better understanding both the response of New Zealand society to the return of its first large citizen army, and the economic pressures of the interwar years which saw the development of government policies for the relief of the rural economy. A theme of this study has been the identification of the sources of the notion of failure, and the conduits, both ideological and mechanical, through which these notions have been transmitted to the present day. This study does not question the often difficult personal circumstances of individual soldier settlers and their families during the interwar period, but does question the overlay of mythology, folklore, and disinformation that has surrounded this subject.⁸

⁸ For an explanation of the use of myth in a New Zealand historical context see James Belich, 'War', *The Future of the Past: Themes in New Zealand History*, Colin Davis and Peter Lineham, (eds.), Palmerston North, 1991, pp.129-133.

CHAPTER 1

SOLDIERS AND HISTORIANS

In his work on British post-war planning for reconstruction, Paul Johnson has asked 'how shall we pass judgement on reconstruction? Was it a success, a failure - or a mixture of both?'¹ He has observed that the commentary and judgement upon the efforts of the authorities was, in the interwar years, implicit, whereas present-day scholarship is explicit, leaving nothing to be guessed or inferred, the verdicts flat, and outspoken.² The same question can be asked, and observation made, of the New Zealand post-war repatriation effort and more particularly of soldier land settlement. As recently as 1990 the *Oxford Illustrated History of New Zealand* described the soldier land settlement scheme after World War I as 'one of the greatest disasters in social planning New Zealand has ever known', while Boyack and Tolerton, editors of a recent oral history of World War I soldiers, observed: 'The government's most famous rehabilitation measure - and certainly the most disastrous - was its land settlement scheme'.³ These comments were made without citing reference works or primary sources, yet their damning tone implied the subject of soldier settlement had been satisfactorily researched, judged, and found to be wanting. What is the nature of the received wisdom on the discharged soldiers' settlement scheme? How has it developed? Do specific themes emerge from the literature that have remained unchanged over the passage of time, and, conversely how have later studies modified the image?

¹ Paul Barton Johnson, *Land Fit For Heroes: The Planning of British Reconstruction 1916-1919*, Chicago, 1968, p.505.

² *ibid.*, p.505.

³ Miles Fairburn, 'The Farmers Take Over (1912-1930)', *The Oxford Illustrated History of New Zealand*, Keith Sinclair, (ed.), Auckland, 1990, p.205; Nicholas Boyack and Jane Tolerton, (eds.), *In The Shadow of War: New Zealand Soldiers Talk About World War One and Their Lives*, Auckland, 1990, p.247.

The review that follows is organised chronologically, and is primarily restricted to published books and articles, although newspapers and academic theses are commented upon. The latter comprise four MA theses, three of which mention the schemes in relation to other topics.⁴ The fourth is specifically on the settlement scheme as it was applied in the Canterbury Land District.⁵ The historian of the World War II rehabilitation scheme has a useful commentary in the opening two chapters of her thesis.⁶

An initial observation that can be made, is that soldier land settlement schemes have not generated a large body of critical scholarship. Despite this, the problems associated with the reassimilation of World War I New Zealand soldiers into society have over the years become part of the nation's folklore and been expressed in almost every general history. The experience of the returned soldiers in the interwar period has been referred to as one of betrayal.⁷ This suggests that the various schemes put in place for returned soldiers not only failed to meet their needs, but were, in some way, a conscious renunciation of the moral claim of soldiers to special treatment from both the Government and community. On the one hand we celebrate the military disaster that was Gallipoli as a component of the development of national identity and statehood,⁸ while on the other, the treatment of the survivors has come to be viewed as an indictment of the uncaring

⁴ J.O. Melling, 'The New Zealand Returned Soldiers' Association 1916-23', MA thesis in History, Victoria University, Wellington, 1952; J. Kizito, 'The Administration of State Land Development and Settlement in New Zealand', MA thesis in Political Science, Auckland University, 1974; D.J. George, 'The Depression of 1921-22 in New Zealand', MA thesis in History, Auckland University, 1969.

⁵ W.G. Allan, 'The Resettlement of Discharged Soldiers on Crown Land in Canterbury: 1915-40', MA thesis in Geography, Canterbury University, 1967.

⁶ J.R.M Thompson, 'The Rehabilitation of Servicemen to World War Two in New Zealand 1940-1954', PhD thesis in History, Victoria University, Wellington, 1983.

⁷ Boyack and Tolerton, *In The Shadow of War*, p.245.

⁸ For the role of this in the development of New Zealand nationalism see Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male*, Auckland, 1987, pp.158-169; Keith Sinclair, *A Destiny Apart: New Zealand's Search for National Identity*, Wellington, 1986, pp.171-173.

and incompetent conservative Reform Government.⁹ Reflecting a strongly progressive interpretation, the only positive result that appeared to come from the World War I repatriation schemes, we are told, was how not to organise and administer them; a lesson well learned by the first Labour Government.¹⁰

What is most striking about the received wisdom is that there is a remarkable consistency over time in published works (which in turn drew heavily from works published in the 1930s). The trend noted by Johnson in his British study for judgements on reconstruction policies to harden in later years is also prevalent in the New Zealand story. The judgemental tone of the commentary on soldier settlement increases over time until we are presented with the contemporary views expressed in the opening quotations by Sinclair, and Boyack and Tolerton; harsh, morally self-satisfied, and accusing.

The current received wisdom can be summarised thus: poor government planning of land acquisition for the settlement of returning soldiers led to the already booming wartime land market becoming wildly over-inflated and totally unrelated to productive reality or earning capacity. The Crown aggravated the problem by entering the market to purchase indiscriminately land of dubious quality at high prices for soldier settlement. Young and inexperienced soldiers with little or no capital were 'placed' on back-country bush land, or on sections that were too small to ever be economic. As a consequence, soldiers' farms carried large financial commitments, either by way of leases based on unrealistic capital values, or high mortgages. The 1921 depression in commodity prices, which was caused by the termination of the wartime commandeered purchase agreements with the Imperial Government, left soldier settlers in dire financial circumstances. Poor prices for

⁹ Miles Fairburn has criticised this view of the conservative Massey Government, 'The Farmers Take Over', *The Oxford Illustrated History of New Zealand*, Keith Sinclair, (ed.), Auckland, 1990, p.206.

¹⁰ Thompson, 'The Rehabilitation of Servicemen'. For a more specific reference to controls on speculation see Jane Thompson, 'The policy of Land Sales Control: Sharing the Sacrifice', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 25(1), 1991, pp.3-17; see also R.J. MacLachlan, 'Land Administration in New Zealand', *Rural Land Administration in New Zealand*, J. Bruce Brown (ed.), Wellington, 1966, pp.31-32.

produce, large expenditure for improvements, the cost of stock, and inept subdivision forced many of the returned soldiers, through no fault of their own, to 'walk off' in defeat. Despite belated government attempts to revalue properties, those returned soldiers who survived the uncertain 1920s were eventually dispatched by the depression of the early 1930s. Linked to this was the unpreparedness of the country for the post-war depression. A generation had become accustomed to ever-increasing returns for rural commodities. The somehow amoral speculation in land, benefiting the propertied class and harking back to the excesses of the pre-liberal period, has been seen as the harbinger of the subsequent problems faced by the soldier settlers.

Contemporary popular publications in the 1920s were few and in fact, apart from official reports and numerous references in newspapers, little else appeared in print. Frank Anthony's short stories and his substantial and satirical pieces on the subject of two returned soldiers farming in Taranaki, appeared in serial form in the *Auckland Weekly News*, *New Zealand Herald*, and the *Weekly Press*.¹¹ As Terry Sturm observed, the image of the farmer characters in Anthony's work was one of their struggle as the lowest players in the farming world. The humour used to portray the antics of the two main characters was, according to Sturm, a comment upon the pervasive rural myth which provided the underpinning to the land settlement scheme for soldiers, in which Anthony himself was a participant. That they would eventually succeed is taken as given by the characters, despite evidence that they had poor land, inconsistent herds, and financial commitments their farms could not meet. The stories exemplify those themes of the settlement scheme that had gained publicity in the press media, such as the price and quality of land, and the shortages of good dairy stock. Despite the obvious satire, the message of the personal and financial struggles of the nation's defenders was not lost on contemporary readers. In his preface to a recent edition of Anthony's *Follow the Call*, Terry Sturm repeated the traditional story of soldier settlement to provide the historical context of Anthony's fiction. The radio serialisation of Anthony's *Me*

¹¹ Frank S. Anthony, *Follow the Call*, Terry Sturm (ed.), Auckland, 1975. First published in serial form 1924 in the *Weekly Press*, and in a condensed revised version in 1936.

and Gus stories in the 1950s was also significant in terms of the image of the World War I settlement scheme. The experience of the two characters, presented as humour, contrasted with the experiences of the 1950s rural community. The comparisons were obvious: poor but expensive land, uncertain prices, poor stock, bad roads, inexperience; the antithesis to post World War II rural New Zealand.

The most crucial agents for the dissemination of various versions of the soldiers' story were the newspapers. The debate on post-war measures for returning soldiers was carried out in the nation's press. However, the newspapers also reflected extremes of political bias in the community between Liberal and Reform political values. The issue of land provision for soldier settlements galvanised the partisan press. The Liberal urban newspapers were proponents of compulsory purchase, group settlement of soldiers on the 'teeming millions' of acres of existing Crown Land, and large development grants for the settlers. The radical pro-Labour *Maoriland Worker*, edited by Harry Holland up to 1918, attacked the free-market land purchase policy of the Reform Government as lining the pockets of the large landowners. The Reform press tended to support the government's handling of the settlement scheme, although there was criticism of the prices paid for some estate land. The debates in the press on the subject of land settlement had as much to do with the ideological battles of land acquisition during the previous twenty-five years as they did with the immediate and pressing problem of the soldiers. The returned soldiers' high public profile, built upon the mystique of Gallipoli and their reported exploits at war, meant they were accorded especially deserving status by the community and the press. The Returned Soldiers' Association (RSA) became adept at using the press to maintain a high public profile. The problems faced during the early establishment phase of settlement made good editorial subjects and expressed the community's concern for the soldiers.

A significant factor in the activities of newspapers was the collapse of the wartime Coalition Government prior to the 1919 election. Despite the avowed intentions of the two main parties not to politicise the repatriation of the soldiers, this was just what the politicians and the partisan press did. The impact of the 1921 depression

and problems facing the soldier settlers set the seal on the image of the settlement scheme as failing the nation's defenders. Despite the relief programme established by the Reform Government during 1922 and 1923, the Liberal/Labour press appeared to win the ideological battle for the minds of the community. Specific cases of uncaring policies, or simply incompetent government action over specific settlements or individual soldier settlers, was always newsworthy.

The *New Zealand Farmer Stock and Station Journal* was a conservative and influential monthly during and immediately after the War. The tenor of its articles and editorials on soldier land settlement during the war had, for the most part, a rural arcadian flavour about them. The paper saw unlimited possibilities for the group settlement of soldiers on the land, particularly virgin Crown Land. It was highly critical of both the Government purchasing improved estates at then market values and what it saw as the slow rate of settlement. Nothing was to be too great for the defenders of the empire and during 1919 and early 1920 it ran a special editorial page titled,

**The Fight for Empire, and After - Settling the
Returned Soldier. The land is Calling to
Battleworn Men. It is the Country's Duty to
Answer it.**

'Experts' of the 'practical' kind were given the opportunity to pontificate on their pet schemes, preaching dire warnings on the folly of the Government's policies of land purchase and settling inexperienced men on the land. The evidence suggests that the paper represented the interests of the small farmer rather than those of the larger landowners represented by the *New Zealand Farmers' Union*. Perhaps because of a change of editor, the soldiers had almost disappeared from the pages of the *Farmer* by late 1920. In 1926, in relation to the process of revaluation then almost completed, the paper reported: 'Although the proportion of failures has been small, we cannot lose sight of the suffering and worry undergone by the individuals concerned.... but the pioneering spirit is still dominant, and there is reason to

expect that the majority will overcome all difficulties'.¹² This move towards the official government view of the scheme could also reflect the perceived threat posed by the growth of the Labour Party and the concern generated over the calls by Labour for the nationalisation of land, and forced revaluations of mortgages.

A detailed, although limited circulation, book on land legislation was produced in 1924 by W.R. Jourdain, for a number of years Chief Clerk of the Department of Lands and Survey. *Land Legislation and Settlement in New Zealand* was largely a compilation of the Department's reports, many of which Jourdain wrote, and of legislation relevant to land matters.¹³ His section on the settlement of returned soldiers is more descriptive than analytical of the various pieces of legislation. Jourdain suggested that problems with the scheme became apparent as early as 1918-1919. He claimed this was because 'the prices of produce began to drop and to remain at a considerably lower level than had been anticipated'.¹⁴ Following the official stance, based on the pioneer model of the virtue of hard work, he implied that failure might have been a personal fault of the soldiers, and noted that government assistance, through the Dominion Revaluation Board, was for those who had proved capable and energetic: 'those deserving soldiers should [in 1924] be assisted to a position of stability'.¹⁵ Despite this early reference to the failure of individual soldiers, the implication that the soldiers were in any way culpable for their position has not remained part of the transmitted story over time.

¹² *New Zealand Farmer Stock and Station Journal*, September 1926, p.1295.

¹³ W.R. Jourdain, *Land Legislation and Settlement in New Zealand*, Wellington, 1925.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.48. He may have been trying to introduce an outside destabilising factor into the settlement equation, earlier than traditionally expressed, so as to absolve the Department and the recently retired Undersecretary, T.N. Brodrick, from blame for the problems which had emerged from the findings of the 1922-23 Enquiry Boards. Jourdain's memoirs expressed his close relationship to Brodrick and also highlighted his antipathy towards Brodrick's successor, J.B. Thompson. See W.R. Jourdain, *Reminiscences of a Civil Servant*, Wellington, 1938, p.14.

¹⁵ Jourdain, *Land Legislation*, p.49.

Three scholarly works which appeared in the mid-1930s placed the soldier settlement scheme within the economic development of the country since the War.¹⁶ These works have all contributed significantly towards the creation of our present image of the settlement scheme. Two of them, which still remain standard texts, are the product of the rise of the professional economist as an authority on policies of national development in the interwar period, under the patronage of Gordon Coates. In his 1936 work J.B. Condliffe, introduced the soldier settlement scheme in the context of the on-going policy of closer settlement that had been pursued by the Liberals.¹⁷ Quoting figures from the 1936 *Official Year Book*, Condliffe suggested that the repatriation policy, although financially costly because of purchases made at the height of the land boom, was a significant factor in encouraging closer settlement in the interwar period.¹⁸ In discussing the speculative land boom Condliffe observed that, although speculation was made easy by land transfer mechanisms, the boom itself was the result of two factors. Firstly, overseas borrowing for public works and the prosecution of the war had pushed up prices which had a flow-on effect to land values, while secondly, speculative trafficking in land which had been also encouraged by the Government's policy of repurchasing improved estates for soldier resettlement. Land purchase for soldier settlement was seen by Condliffe as the most significant government contribution to land speculation. He observed: 'In effect the

¹⁶ J.B. Condliffe, *New Zealand in the Making: A Survey of Economic and Social Development*, London, 1936, reprint 1959; D.O. Williams, 'Land Settlement and Settlement Finance', *Agricultural Organisation in New Zealand: A Survey of Land Utilization, Farm Organisation, Finance and Marketing*, H. Belshaw, et al.,(eds.), Melbourne, 1936, pp.123-149; W.P. Morrell, *New Zealand*, London, 1935. A series of articles on the nature of the New Zealand rural economy written by Belshaw and Condliffe appeared in the mid to late 1920s and provided the framework for aspects of the later publications. See J.B. Condliffe, and H. Belshaw, 'A Brief Survey of Rural Credit', *New Zealand Journal of Science and Technology*, 7(6), 1925, pp.334-352; H. Belshaw, 'Agricultural Credit and the Control of Land Values', *New Zealand Journal of Science and Technology*, 1926, pp.76-83; and 'The Economic Position of the Farmer in New Zealand', *Economic Record*, 4, 1928, pp.53-70, which was also read by Belshaw at the National Industrial Conference, March, 1928, and printed in *AJHR*, H.35, 1928, pp.29-32.

¹⁷ Condliffe suggested that by 1907 the lands for settlement policy of repurchase and subdivision had become too costly a method of encouraging closer settlement. According to Condliffe, the success of the scheme prior to this date followed from market forces, rather than political intervention, with the expanding dairy industry acting as the catalyst for the success in the early years of the scheme. Condliffe, *New Zealand in the Making*, pp.256, 264.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.264.

Government turned loose in the real estate market 22,792 new purchasers armed with £23,570,491 of borrowed money, without attempting to place any controls on land prices'.¹⁹ Condliffe was an advocate of Keynesian control of the economy, hence his antipathy towards Massey's policies based upon 'patriotic impulses combined with his belief in the freehold'.²⁰ He had earlier commented upon the very generous assistance given to the discharged soldiers.²¹ Belshaw's estimate that between 1915-1925 approximately half the occupied area of the country changed hands was used by Condliffe to indicate the degree of land trading.²² Almost as an aside, Condliffe summed up the attitude of those farmers who were selling much of the land:

The progress of settlement and a rising level of general prices tempted the farmers to regard the appreciation of land values rather than improvements in production as the goal of their endeavours, ... land speculation remain[s] the outstanding characteristic of New Zealand farming.²³

In reviewing the economic record of the soldier settlement scheme, Condliffe considered it impossible to estimate the total loss suffered by soldiers, their private creditors, and the Government from the abandonment of holdings and loss of equities. He suggested that the repayment of £12,743,804 of the principal of £23,570,491 by 31 March 1935 represented the degree of fall in the settlers' equities commensurate with the decline in land values.²⁴

Condliffe also wrote a history of New Zealand which was subsequently revised by Willis Airey. The story of the soldier settlement scheme, a simplified version of his longer and more detailed works, stated that land speculation based on rising

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.276. He is also including some 12,000 soldiers assisted to build or purchase urban homes.

²⁰ J.B. Condliffe, *The Welfare State in New Zealand*, London, 1959, p.19.

²¹ Condliffe and Belsaw, 'A Brief Survey of Rural Credit', p.342.

²² Condliffe, *New Zealand in the Making*, p.275.

²³ *ibid.*, p.277.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.276.

prices of commodities lured the Government into careless expenditure, while cheap credit for the farming community led to an over-optimistic financial outlook. These existing tendencies were not helped by the injection of capital into the market by the soldier settlement scheme.²⁵ Condliffe's concern in his writing appeared to be with the economic cost of the schemes. The actual direction of the scheme and the policy of soldier settlement was not questioned. This is perhaps explicable in light of Condliffe's earlier role as a member of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force Education Section where he was responsible for constructing a teaching syllabus to prepare New Zealand troops for return to civilian life.²⁶

D.O. Williams, a University agricultural economist writing in 1936, saw the discharged soldiers' land settlement programmes as an extension of the 'Land For Settlements' legislation. He presented figures of the numbers settled without judging the morality of the scheme.²⁷ Williams noted that the Government had been liberal in providing £5.6 million on current account and over £9 million as assistance towards the purchase of farms, market gardens etc. and the discharge of mortgages.²⁸ Both Williams and Condliffe saw the scheme as a continuation of the policy of closer settlement that had been pursued by successive governments since the 1890s.

W.P. Morrell, writing in the 1930s²⁹, viewed the soldier repatriation scheme within the context of the optimism that was felt in New Zealand immediately after

²⁵ J.B. Condliffe and W.T.G. Airey, *A Short History of New Zealand*, Wellington, 1935, and revised edition 1960, pp.195-200.

²⁶ See chapter 3 below for details of the training scheme.

²⁷ D.O. Williams, 'Land Tenure and Land Transfer', *Agricultural Organisation*, Belshaw et al., (eds.), pp.174-193. Williams quotes figures of 4,071 allotments aggregating 1,432,690 acres of special Crown, Settlement, and National Endowment lands being made to soldiers between 1915 and March 31, 1933. He also notes that sale, forfeiture, and abandonment of properties reduced the number of holdings to 2,727, and that only 121 properties had been purchased by either cash or on deferred payment. (The figure of 4,071 represents the number of transactions under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act only, and makes no allowance for the soldiers settled under other acts, or those given mortgage assistance to purchase freehold land or existing Crown leases under sections 2 and 3 of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act, 1917).

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.126.

²⁹ Morrell, *New Zealand*.

the war, and in support of this claim cited a comment from the *Round Table*: 'Investment stocks are high, pastoral and agricultural lands are fetching big prices and constantly changing hands'.³⁰ He observed that a speculative boom had merged with government policies designed to lead the country back to normal life after the war. Although he questioned the wisdom of letting loose 20,000 purchasers with £20 million of government credit upon a rising market, he emphasised the important mind-set of New Zealanders which considered it 'natural that New Zealand soldiers should have a certain bias in favour of life on the land'.³¹ This made the Government's decision to financially assist soldiers explicable in terms of its perception of a future national good based on closer land settlement, although, as Morrell observed, criticism of the Government's policy was easy in hindsight. Morrell saw policy and obligation combining to bring about the scheme and he quoted a former official of the Lands Department who observed:

The virgin land was limited and was situated far back; the soldiers wanted to start on places which could provide them with an immediate return. The consequence was that the men concentrated their attention on securing improved properties. This resulted in a swarm of soldiers roaming the country, knocking at the farmers' doors, asking them to sell.³²

Due to the force of public opinion and the demands of the soldiers 'the checks imposed by experienced departmental officers were', according to Morrell, 'swept away... the soldiers received their land and the farmers their money'.³³ The level of debt-servicing required by mortgages entered into during boom conditions could not be sustained in the face of declining commodity prices and while land values were written down under the discharged soldiers' settlement scheme, most of the fixed charges such as rates and living expenses remained at a higher level. According to Morrell, New Zealand was full of farmers who had purchased land at peak prices and were loaded with debt.

³⁰ *Round Table*, March 1920, quoted by Morrell, *New Zealand*, p.111.

³¹ Morrell, *New Zealand*, p.111.

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*, pp.111-112.

Morrell made use of much the same material in a later work. However, the intervention of twenty-two years and a different set national priorities justified the inclusion of new comments on aspects of the scheme.³⁴ Problems of reversion of the central North Island bush farms were discussed in relation to the dearth of available land for the settlement of soldiers after World War I. Morrell was similarly sympathetic in the later work to the position of members of Land Boards and officials of the Department of Lands, whom he exonerated for problems experienced in the land settlement scheme because pressure from the public and popular press had forced their hands.

A clutch of single-volume histories appeared in the late 1930s. Shrimpton and Mulgan mentioned the soldier settlement scheme in the context of the general state of economic euphoria in the immediate post-war period based on the high returns for commodities. They claimed that booming land prices did not dissuade the Government from purchasing millions of pounds worth of land at high prices to meet the demand from the community that the soldiers should be settled on the land.³⁵ J.C. Beaglehole, in his 1936 short history, made the point that speculation was based on wartime profits and the raising of loans by 'the farmers' government for the settlement of soldiers.³⁶ A.D. McIntosh and W.B. Sutch, writing in 1939, claimed that the settlement scheme was unsuccessful because of the Government's intervention into the land market, which had pushed values beyond economic levels.³⁷ Thus the land boom, combined with the poor quality of the land made available to the soldiers, resulted in an 'inevitable crop of failures'.³⁸

Although mentioning soldier settlement only in an oblique way, John Mulgan's significant novel *Man Alone*, represented the view that the interwar period was one

³⁴ W.P. Morrell and D.O.W. Hall, *A History of New Zealand Life*, Christchurch, 1957, pp.235-237.

³⁵ A.W. Shrimpton and Alan Mulgan, *A History of New Zealand*, second and revised edition, Auckland, 1956.

³⁶ J.C. Beaglehole, *New Zealand: A Short History*, London. 1936, p.81.

³⁷ A.D. McIntosh and W.B. Sutch, 'Opening up the Country', *Contemporary New Zealand*, New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, Wellington, 1938, p.38.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.60.

of betrayal.³⁹ Economic individualism had failed to meet the challenges of the depression and through the eyes of Johnson, the main character, Mulgan explored the inequalities that made the peace, 'the bit in between', worse and more disturbing for many people than the actual wars. The significance of the book is that it articulated the experience of the 1930s depression in the context of the World War I and its aftermath. New Zealand of the 'twenties was described as a lucky country with opportunities; marginal farms were operated in the hope that with the progress of time and hard work everything would come right. Johnson's early contact with two farmers in the bar of an Auckland hotel sets the scene of the booming land market and the inconsistent attitude of mind this engendered in the farming community. Although the two farmers lament the boom conditions to which soldiers are returning, Johnson learns that one had unsuccessfully been trying to sell some land to 'the Board'.⁴⁰

John Mulgan's father, Alan Mulgan, wrote in 1944 that 'soldier settlement and transport were front-rank controversies in the years after the war'.⁴¹ He viewed the land boom in a less judgemental way than those noted above, and observed that there was 'general agreement that the returned soldier must be treated handsomely'. He placed the problems faced by the soldier settlers after prices slumped in 1921 in the same context as the general farming community, and noted that government intervention to relieve the plight of soldier settlers was eventually extended to save civilian farmer mortgagors.⁴²

³⁹ John Mulgan, *Man Alone*, Hamilton, 1949. This was written at Oxford in the late 1930s.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.12. Mulgan could be alluding to either of two Boards. The regional Land Board was responsible for the purchase of private farms for soldiers under section 2 of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act 1917, while district Land Purchase Boards, established in late 1919 to reduce the pressure on the Dominion Land Purchase Board based in Wellington, were responsible for the purchase of land under the Land for Settlements Act, 1908, for subsequent lease as Crown Land.

⁴¹ Alan Mulgan, *From Track to Highway: A Short History of New Zealand*, Wellington, 1944, p.110.

⁴² *ibid.*

In early 1940 an employee of Treasury, B.D.A. Greig, wrote a briefing paper for the Minister of Finance, Walter Nash, in which he catalogued the failings of the Reform Government's First World War scheme, and suggested a framework within which to consider future schemes.⁴³ Although not published, the report was a significant criticism and made a major contribution to the direction of the World War II scheme, and indirectly to public perception of the earlier initiative. Greig identified two phases of rehabilitation; the first involved those soldiers sent home during the war because of wounds or illness, and the second involved the mass demobilisation after the war. Greig quoted the figures of Jourdain, showing that by 31 March 1925, a total of 22,326 soldiers had been advanced £22 million for both urban and rural land settlement. He was scathing in his comments on the land purchase policy of the Department of Lands and suggested that little was done until 1918 when, 'a tremendous amount of work had to be done hurriedly and therefore badly'.⁴⁴ He outlined the change in the machinery of land purchase required to expedite the purchase of land that was being offered to the Government at 'exorbitant prices and eagerly demanded by soldiers, even at ridiculous prices'.⁴⁵ Greig was critical of the Government's settlement policy and, without reference to the political, economic, or social climate of the day, suggested that 'it would seem that preliminary study and the exercise of a little caution would surely have led to a better result'.⁴⁶

Although he seemed to take pride in the fact that no other country made a relatively greater effort to settle returned soldiers, Greig was highly critical of the economic waste involved. He suggested that the scheme was a failure because the land and commodity boom had engendered a lack of caution, and resulted in policy and legislative mistakes, compounded by poor administration. Greig saw state intervention and central control in a positive light and was critical of the dispersal

⁴³ B.D.A. Greig, 'Rehabilitation of Returned Men of the Forces', Treasury briefing paper, May, 1940, p.5, Treasury 25/146-155, NA.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

of authority for the spending of government funds which had been a strong and widely approved characteristic of the World War I repatriation programme. In his cost-accounting perception, success was judged by financial efficiency.⁴⁷ Greig's report appears to have found its way to a wider audience in a 1941 pamphlet printed by the Labour Government for distribution to New Zealand servicemen in anticipation of the subsequently cancelled 1941 election.

Entitled *Farms for Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen: Fighters for Democracy*, the Labour Party pamphlet was a very subtle piece of propaganda.⁴⁸ Not only did it explain to the servicemen the benefits of the proposed scheme for themselves, but it was also designed to placate potential opposition in the farming community to controls imposed on land-dealing by the Small Farms Amendment Act, 1940.⁴⁹ The method used was to set up 'selected' aspects of the World War I scheme and use these as benchmarks of failure, something Labour would avoid. The text of the pamphlet introduced some-hard hitting strains of emotion; 'abandon hope all ye who enter here might well have been posted on the gates of many of the farms provided for discharged soldiers after the 1914-18 War', and 'the severe lessons of those men's plight have not been forgotten. They will not be repeated'. Central to Labour's plan was the control of land prices so that there would be no exploitation of the soldier-farmers or the taxpayer. Contemporary 1940 examples were given of unpatriotic landowners offering land for soldier settlement at highly inflated prices to prove that the evil of speculation, the root cause of the 'failure' of the World War I scheme, was still prevalent. The need for planning was stressed and, although Frank Langstone, Minister of Lands, evoked images of rural arcadia that

⁴⁷ Greig's article has had two important consequences for the scholarly view of the soldier settlement scheme in New Zealand. The critique of the scheme has been used as evidence of the failings of the World War I scheme by Thompson in her PhD thesis of the Rehabilitation of New Zealand soldiers after World War II, and by Boyack and Tolerton in their study of World War I returned soldiers.

⁴⁸ New Zealand Labour Party, *Farms for Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen, Fighters for Democracy*, Wellington, 1941, WTU.

⁴⁹ These powers were subsequently increased by the Servicemen's Settlement and Land Sale Act, 1943.

fit the image presented by Miles Fairburn,⁵⁰ the point was made, finally, that the Government possessed no large areas of land for settlement, hence, the need for a programme of repurchase of private land. It was stressed that the scheme envisaged by the Government was to be 'economically sound', and that the farms were to be considered as freestanding economic units. This contrasted with Reform's World War I intention to provide small farms that offered rural lifestyles for recuperative purposes, while also being close to centres of employment.⁵¹ This somewhat blurred line between rural and urban existence was to have no place in the World War II scheme. In the Treasury-inspired Labour view, farms were solely for production.

The pamphlet included a section titled 'Costs and Losses'. After first noting the total number of soldiers helped after World War I (9665), figures were presented showing the cost of purchase of a number of estates by the Reform Government for the settlement of returned soldiers. These costs were then compared to the revised valuations after relief measures had been effected to show 'how disastrous the loss has been'. A loss of £12,567,000 from a total outlay of £20,654,000 was claimed.⁵² The principle of writing down debt was defended as lifting the responsibility from the shoulders of the individual but the burden of this expense to the taxpayer was emphasised. The final section of the pamphlet related to the need to match the soldier with the land; 'The farmer settler must be a person who is able to "make good" on good land'. This suggested Labour envisaged a 'reward' restricted in a way Reform's had not been. At least five times the message was repeated that Labour would avoid the mistakes that occurred after 1914-18. The publication was a justification for present action and used the devil of the past to add further credence to what would emerge as a revolutionary land-price control programme. It was also an appeal to nationalism in the guise of a post-war threat from margarine and rayon to New Zealand's staple commodities. Despite evoking

⁵⁰ Miles Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and its Enemies: The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society, 1850-1900*, Auckland, 1989, pp.29-41.

⁵¹ See Table 9, chapter 15 for the detailed figures for this aspect of the settlement scheme.

⁵² This figure appears to have been arrived at from those quoted by Condliffe above.

images of natural abundance and reward, the ideal of land settlement was to be moderated by sound economic principles of management of both land acquisition and the participating soldier settlers.

The Labour Party obviously had an eye on the election, but it is also apparent that the soldiers provided the opportunity for the possible control of land sales on a scale commensurate with the controls being put into place in other areas of the economy. The notion that production would be increased provided a strong underpinning for the continued viability of the welfare state. It has been suggested that Labour's attitude to the issue of land-price controls was a contributing factor to its loss of support in rural seats in the 1943 election, while publicity about the plans for rehabilitation, it has been argued, gained a significant measure of support for the Government from New Zealand troops stationed overseas.⁵³

J.O. Melling's 1952 MA thesis on the Returned Soldiers' Association devoted a chapter to the land settlement scheme and, was up to that time the most thorough investigation conducted by any writer using records other than published statistics and anecdote.⁵⁴ Using mainly RSA records and the RSA publication, *Quick March*, he concluded that the Government had invested well in the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Schemes.⁵⁵ He noted that 'it is [the] conflict between the desire to take advantage of farming prosperity and the crippling financial burden of buying land at inflated prices that formed the background to the Massey Government's attempt to turn returned soldiers into farmers'.⁵⁶

Melling claimed that the RSA considered the Government was remiss in its responsibilities to returned soldiers and, although the Association put forward proposals regarding land settlement schemes, the Government tended to ignore

⁵³ J.R.S. Daniels, 'The General Election of 1943', MA thesis in Political Science, Victoria University, Wellington, 1961, pp. 312, 337.

⁵⁴ Melling, 'The Returned Soldiers' Association'.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.98.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.81.

them. He noted that the Farmers' Union closely co-operated with the RSA and even suggested the compulsory taking of land for settlement.⁵⁷ Melling incorrectly believed that the RSA managed to force Massey to reinstitute the scheme after it had been temporarily halted in 1920.⁵⁸ Melling suggested that three-quarters of soldiers settled took up farms with help from non-governmental agencies such as patriotic societies, which he called Massey's policy of help for those who help themselves.⁵⁹

The most influential of the single-volume general histories over the past thirty years are those by Oliver and Sinclair.⁶⁰ Both dealt with the soldier settlement schemes within the context of the abnormal economic state which existed immediately after the war. Oliver suggested that the wartime boom in commodity prices had brought about a land boom which was exacerbated by the Government's policy of land purchase for returned soldiers. The net result was that many soldier farmers were heavily committed to large mortgage repayments on land that was considerably over-valued. Their position was desperate following the removal in 1920 of the high prices paid under commandeered purchase agreements and the onset of the subsequent depression.⁶¹ Oliver was the first of the generalists to emphasise the settlement of the soldier settlers on marginal bush lands. He observed that 'a good number of would-be farmers, ex-servicemen, had been helped by the state on to land more suitable for forests than for pastures. Total and partial failures among these farmers were very numerous.'⁶² He did not elaborate on a bench-mark for 'partial failure'. Oliver noted that in more buoyant times these men may have garnered the necessary development finance to have achieved success but, 'in the 1920s there was little hope for them.... Land, cows and credit

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.85.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, pp.85-90.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, pp.92-93.

⁶⁰ W.H. Oliver, *The Story of New Zealand*, London, 1960; Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, Reading, 1959, revised Edition, 1984.

⁶¹ Oliver, *The Story of New Zealand*, p.172.

⁶² *ibid.*

were no longer, for these unfortunate returned servicemen... a reliable prescription for prosperity'.⁶³

Sinclair relied heavily upon Condliffe and Airey, and on Morrell, for his generalised comments. Again, the emphasis was placed on the effect of the commandeered and high commodity prices on land prices. The action of speculators was combined with the Government's policy of improved estate land purchase, at often inflated prices, to explain the economic environment into which the discharged soldiers were introduced. Dramatising the effect of '22,000 new purchasers, waving £22,600,000 of borrowed money', Sinclair claimed that soldiers were swarming over the countryside pleading with farmers to sell.⁶⁴ He used Belshaw's figures of approximately half the land in New Zealand changing hands between 1915 and 1924 to show the degree of land dealing, and the magnitude of the financial problems facing soldier settlers with the drop in prices congruent with the removal of the commandeered. Sinclair noted that a good many ex-servicemen gave up their holdings, while the Government was forced into remedial action by writing down the capital values of many of the soldier farms.⁶⁵

W.G. Allan's 1967 MA thesis was a regional study of the Canterbury Land District.⁶⁶ The study aimed to show the distribution of farm settlement blocks, discuss the purchase, settlement, and development phases, and provide a detailed analysis of the 'severe' problems which hampered the scheme. Allan identified as principal themes the failure of the soldier settlers themselves, and the scheme as a whole. Allan's concern with 'a lack of any substantial source', forced him into a reliance on oral sources.⁶⁷ He noted that his sources included administrators, retired Crown solicitors, and representatives of the Returned Servicemen's Association and, that 'these men were, as a result of their experiences, able to

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, p.244.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ Allan, 'The Resettlement of Discharged Soldiers on Crown Land'.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p.7.

recommend where emphasis should be made in the treatment of the data obtained'.⁶⁸ Allan further limits the value of the study to the wider context of the soldier settlement programme by concentrating only on those soldiers who settled Crown land. He stated that this was because no maps were available to trace those who purchased private land with government assistance. One of his oral sources suggested that private acquisition outnumbered state leases by a ratio of three to one and Allan defended his minority study on the grounds that his 'sources' suggested there was no appreciable difference between the experiences of soldiers from both groups.⁶⁹

Allan was critical of the early legislation relating to the proposed scheme. With all the advantages of hindsight he flayed Massey for grossly underestimating the financial resources required for the scheme, 'Massey...had no conception of the magnitude of the scheme he was about to initiate.... His belief that the amount [£50,000] would be sufficient "for the first couple of years" was both a gross under-estimate as well as further evidence of administrative inefficiency by the Crown'.⁷⁰ Allan's interpretation relied heavily on conclusions drawn from graphs and tables of official figures derived from the 'Soldiers' Register',⁷¹ and from published reports in the *AJHR*. His comments on failure, in terms of farm types, length of occupation, and periods in which farms were first settled, are superficially useful. However, he did not understand the use of the surrender procedure by the Department of Lands as a tool to vary tenure. His use of oral sources provided insight into the programme of relief measures for soldiers, particularly in the period after 1938 when, he claimed, amalgamation became a significant policy followed with some success in Canterbury. He concluded that using criteria of forfeiture and surrender he could not justifiably call the scheme's operations in Canterbury a total failure.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.10.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.23.

⁷¹ This is a list of soldier settler Crown tenants held at National Archives.

Another 'insider's' view similar to that of Jourdain was provided by R.J. Maclachlan, Director-General of Lands in the 1960s. In a contribution to J. Bruce Brown's 1966 *Rural Land Administration in New Zealand*,⁷² Maclachlan saw the beginning of World War I as the end of the period of general land settlement in New Zealand. According to Maclachlan, the major thrust of government settlement from 1914 through to the 1960s was aimed at placing restricted classes of settlers on the land. In this context the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act was the first effort to target a specific group. Maclachlan suggested that in terms of raw numbers of soldiers helped the scheme was very worthwhile. This voice of success in the failure wilderness is likely to be a reflection of Maclachlan's knowledge of the time-consuming process of land settlement after World War II, when ten years were required to settle a similar number of soldiers to that achieved after World War I in a little over two years. He quoted figures of 4,000 soldiers placed onto 1.4 million acres of subdivided Crown Land, while a further 5,500 soldiers were financed onto 1.2 million acres of private land.⁷³ According to Maclachlan, the scheme was extremely unprofitable when measured in terms of social and economic cost. He identified state purchase activity as contributing to the land price boom, and the readily available credit from agencies like the Rural Intermediate Credit Board, as the major components in creating the financial difficulties faced by soldier farmers after 1920. He quoted figures for the cost of the Government's land purchase policy for soldiers which showed that 305 estates were purchased for £6 million while £9 million was advanced to soldiers for existing farms.⁷⁴ As an indication of the frenetic land-dealing activity, Maclachlan claimed there were 56,000 transactions valued at £82 million in 1921. He was overstating his case as these transactions also included urban land transfers, while less than 1000 soldiers were settled during 1921.⁷⁵

⁷² R.J. Maclachlan, 'Land Administration in New Zealand', *Rural Land Administration in New Zealand*, J. Bruce Brown, (ed.), Wellington, 1966, pp.15-36.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p.29.

⁷⁴ These figures are incorrect and relate to all Crown Land settlement in the period 1918 to 1938. See L&S file box 36/24, NA.

⁷⁵ See Chapter 15 below.

Maclachlan mentioned that many of the soldier settlers had little or no farming experience and that this inability was as much a contributing factor to their early failure as the fall in export prices in late 1920-21. Government policy was to keep these farmers on the land until better times returned but, as Maclachlan noted, these did not eventuate for some twenty years. As an ex-Director-General of Lands in the Lands and Survey Department Maclachlan made no reference to the criticism of the Department in the administration of the scheme. This corresponded with his convenient causes of failure, which were outside influences beyond anyone's control, and the personal failings of individual men. The inadequacies of policies and failure of administration did not enter the equation. The same was not true of the Second World War rehabilitation scheme, which Maclachlan saw as a victory for the policy makers and administrators in avoiding the problems of the first scheme - namely high land prices and uncontrolled sales. The 1943 Servicemens' Settlement and Land Sales Act was, in Maclachlan's words 'to facilitate the return of servicemen to normal conditions without the mistakes and failures that followed the First World War'.⁷⁶

A 1974 thesis by J. Kizito on the administration of State Land development also mentioned soldier settlement.⁷⁷ Although the scheme was costly, Kizito noted there was no opposition as 'the Liberal era had inculcated the expectation of State aid to its citizens in adverse times'. He repeated the familiar story on the details of assistance available under the various acts, although he did suggest that the pressure of demand on land meant that certain aspects of the act relating to an embargo on the transfer of soldiers' farms led to 'official connivance at the breaches of the act'. He saw initial political success for the scheme and that 'those who would have been unemployed after the war, roaming the streets and threatening public order, were siphoned off onto land'. Kizito was critical of the RSA which continued to demand concessions for the soldiers even though, in terms of the national good, the scheme should have been slowed. He noted that few

⁷⁶ Maclachlan, 'Land Administration', p.29-31.

⁷⁷ Kizito, 'The Administration of State Land'.

soldiers wanted to start on back-country land but rather preferred 'quick returns' on properties near the centres of communication. Kizito cited Jourdain on the operations of the 1922-23 Enquiry Boards, but added a personal statement from a retired officer of the Department of Agriculture, to the effect that many of the soldier farmers never received invitations by post to have their properties assessed, while others were too demoralised to reply, or had already abandoned.⁷⁸

In an MA history thesis on the depression of 1921-22 in New Zealand, D.J. George devoted a complete chapter to soldier settlement, which he described as 'one of the major problems that the Massey Government had to face in the early postwar years'.⁷⁹ George took the stance that the scheme was in serious difficulties even prior to the short depression of 1921-22, and that 'the slump only hastened and accentuated a process already begun. Many of the soldier settlers were in extreme difficulties before the beginning of the depression'.⁸⁰ George used files from the Department of Lands and Survey which showed that settlers were applying for postponement and remission of rent 'at the peak of prices for farm produce'.⁸¹ He claimed the files 'reveal a tale of hardship and privation which had begun well before the onset of the depression and that 'the Government's contention that the soldier settlers would have thrived if they had not been beset by the slump of 1921-22 was clearly erroneous'.⁸² George presented figures which suggest that those who abandoned their farms prior to 1925 were more likely to have failed prior to the slump and the chances of survival for those 'purchasing' during the boom years of 1920 and early 1921 were slim. His conclusions, like those of

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p.46-50.

⁷⁹ D.J. George, 'The Depression of 1921-22', p.146.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.160.

⁸¹ He fails to note why the soldiers were requesting relief from rental payments; many of the properties were not in production, or were between seasons and so were not receiving income.

⁸² *ibid.*, p.162. George produced figures from the 'Soldiers' Register' of Crown Leases and claimed that of the forfeitures and surrenders entered into the register that occurred between 1918 and 1925, 'those who had acquired land with government assistance before 1919 and forfeited or abandoned it by 1925, did so prior to the slump'. George inferred that this refers to all soldier settlers when in fact it excluded all section 2 men, and the statement also supports my contention that the soldiers were treated leniently when the depression arrived and that the ultimate sanction of forfeiture was used, if only for political reasons, sparingly.

Allan, were largely based on an analysis of the 'Soldiers' Register' held at National Archives. The same weakness is also shared with Allan as the register covered only soldiers receiving leases to Crown and Lands for Settlement properties and at most only some 4,000 soldier settlers were considered. (The issue of quantifying failure is taken up in Chapter 15 below).

George presented unpublished figures which show that of a total of £31 million spent on repatriation the total loss to the state of the soldier settlement scheme was £7,026,284 and such a loss, according to George 'can hardly be termed successful or even satisfactory'.⁸³ George also reproduced figures comparing the purchase price of some of the private estates with the values ruling for the same properties in the mid-1930s to show the disastrous financial loss of the scheme. Despite this, he quoted the Chairman of the Dominion Revaluation Board as saying the reductions [which formed a major component of the 'loss'] were really the cost of repatriation. George argued that the millions should have been spent on a determined effort to develop Crown Land, so repeating the myth that somewhere in New Zealand in 1918 there were vast tracts of Crown Land perfectly suitable for settlement, awaiting the pioneers axe.⁸⁴ Applying the benefit of hindsight, he suggested that the Government should have employed methods and policy which it did not, however, possess until at least the 1930s.⁸⁵ George became captured by the sentiments expressed in his often quoted source - the Liberal partisan press - and failed to identify the type of land settlement system then in operation.⁸⁶

⁸³ *ibid.*, p.168. (L&S file 39/25, NA.)

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p.168.

⁸⁵ Thompson, 'The Rehabilitation of Servicemen', also makes this point about George's claims.

⁸⁶ George, p.170; see also Fairburn, *The Ideal Society*, p.263. The pioneer system was not rejected until the introduction of the Land Laws Amendment act 1929. Tom Brooking has taken George's 'impressively strong evidence', together with the comments by Sinclair and Oliver, to support his claim of a cover up of the problems of the soldier settlement scheme by the President of the Farmers' Union, W.J. Polson. Tom Brooking, 'Agrarian Businessmen Organise: A Comparative Study of the Origins and Early Phases of Development of the National Farmers' Union of England and Wales and the New Zealand Farmers' Union, ca. 1880-1929', PhD thesis in History, Otago University, 1977, pp.383-384.

R.M. Burdon's *The New Dominion* is still the standard reference work on New Zealand between the wars.⁸⁷ He noted that, for reasons of guilt, admiration, and pity, New Zealand society had a generous attitude towards returned soldiers and fully expected the Government to provide for these heroes on their return home.⁸⁸ He observed that the Government's land scheme began with the 'fantastically inadequate' funding of £50,000 but, as Burdon noted, this was increased with subsequent amending acts.⁸⁹ According to Burdon land that was purchased by the Government for returned soldiers was subject to criticism in the local press and the Government's caution was 'deplored and derided'.⁹⁰ When the main body of troops returned in 1919, with the belief that 'peace would bring untold contentment' the harassed government was unable to meet these expectations.⁹¹ Burdon considered that the inability of the Government to adequately handle the problems of repatriation was to some extent the result of the nature of the political environment. Massey and Ward were absent for long periods in Europe and during this time authority and responsibility was delegated to Sir Francis Dillon Bell and Sir James Allen. The exigencies of war and the crises precipitated by it called for improvisation without the benefit of knowledge of the full impact that massive demobilisation would have on society, or the economy.⁹²

Burdon observed that more than 9,000 men had already been placed on the land when the slump arrived in 1921. The result was foreclosure and abandonment as problems of overvalued land, faulty subdivision and dire financial difficulties surfaced.⁹³ The Government's response was to initiate a series of Enquiry

⁸⁷ R.M. Burdon, *The New Dominion: A Social and Political History of New Zealand Between the Wars*, London, 1965.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p.2.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p.13.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p.14.

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ Brian Easton has interpreted the first four chapters of Burdon's book as evidence of the failure of the scheme, and he noted: 'farmers, particularly servicemen, were walking off farms'. B. Easton, 'Three New Zealand Depressions', *New Zealand and the World: Essays in Honour of Wolfgang Rosenberg*, W.E. Willmott, (ed.), Christchurch, 1980, pp.72-86.

Boards and, subsequently, Revaluation Committees.⁹⁴ According to Burdon half the soldier settlers were in major difficulties by 1922 and that 'to many of these men the boom represented a false promise, the slump a gross betrayal'.⁹⁵

R.M. Chapman and E.P. Malone, in a publication designed for secondary schools, provided a short and terse description of the soldier settlement scheme focused within the economic and social environment of the day.⁹⁶ They wrote of the 'problems of the returned soldier' and 'optimism and free spending'. However, the onset of the slump of 1920-21 saw this 'optimism' give way to anxiety. They gave figures of 7,000 soldiers settled on two million acres of land by May 1920. Chapman and Malone claim these men were hampered by small returns, high prices of inputs and excessive debts, while many were struggling with rough rugged land such as inland Taranaki. They described defeated men walking off their farms so that by 1935 there were fewer than 3,000 soldiers left on the land.⁹⁷

In the only published article exclusively on soldier settlement in New Zealand, J.M. Powell investigated the soldier settlement scheme over the years 1915-23 and painted a somewhat confused picture of the scheme.⁹⁸ He provided a review of the legislation and investigated the Government's motivation within the context of the previous twenty or so years of rural prosperity. His view of the operation of the scheme, derived in part from Melling's thesis on the RSA, suggested considerable input from non-governmental bodies such as the RSA, local patriotic societies, and interested parties such as the Farmers' Union. As evidence of this involvement, Powell quoted some published figures from annual reports of the

⁹⁴ Burdon, *The New Dominion*, p.41.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.48.

⁹⁶ R.M. Chapman and E.P. Malone, *New Zealand in the Twenties*, Auckland, 1969.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, pp.3-6.

⁹⁸ J.M. Powell, 'Soldier settlement in New Zealand, 1915-1923', *Australian Geographical Studies*, 9(2), 1971, pp.144-160.

Department of Lands and Survey, but he completely misread and misinterpreted them. He claimed that by 1923 4,881 soldiers held land under major provisions of the various acts while a further 4,363 soldiers had been advanced funds to purchase or erect dwellings in urban locations. Yet, as Powell himself noted, the official reports indicated that 21,584 soldiers had received assistance from the Government. The balance of 12,340 were, according to Powell, those people who received outside assistance to move on to land and over whom the Government could exercise little control relative to the location of settlement.⁹⁹ Powell failed to account for 5,489 soldiers who were assisted to purchase private land or discharge existing mortgages, and he underestimated by 7,000 or more the number of men who were assisted with the purchase or construction of urban homes. This weakened his argument concerning the importance of 'private' assistance. Powell went to considerable lengths to show that the high point of settlement occurred in the period 1919-1920 and, further, that district regional trends are observable.¹⁰⁰

Over half of Powell's article was based on interpretation of the published Enquiry Board Reports.¹⁰¹ In his conclusion he questioned whether the short duration of tenure he identified in the 'Soldiers' Register' indicated speculation or, as he put it, 'the manipulation of a classical financial ploy in the business of pioneer farming, conducted by small men with long-run bona-fide intentions'.¹⁰² He suggested that soldiers were taking up government offerings with the intention of selling for a profit prior to moving up to a larger property. He makes no comment on the embargo on resale included in the 1915 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act, which was designed to stop speculation.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p.148.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, pp.149-150.

¹⁰¹ Soldier Settlement, Summaries of Reports of Enquiry Boards, *AJHR*, C.9A, Parts A&B, 1923.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p.159.

¹⁰³ In 1980 Powell followed up with the comparative article cited above on the soldier settlement schemes in New Zealand, Australia, and Canada. In this he identified regionalism as being a major theme in the New Zealand scheme. This was based on what Powell correctly perceived to be the quasi-independent actions of the regional Land Boards. He also identified a trend of trenchant criticism of the returned soldiers from the Lands Boards and officials of the Department of Lands and Survey. Much of the argument was a restatement of his earlier article. See 'Debt of Honour',

In the *Oxford History of New Zealand*, Tom Brooking described the now familiar scene of the impact of both the commandeer and settlement schemes for returned soldiers on the booming land market.¹⁰⁴ He saw the end of the commandeer and post-war economic adjustment as the cause of the 1920-21 depression. Repeating Condliffe and Belshaw's earlier contention, Brooking noted the depression's impact on a society that had experienced almost twenty-five years of uninterrupted prosperity and upward improvement. According to Brooking the depression was unexpected and had serious consequences on the land settlement schemes for returned soldiers which 'were rudely interrupted and many of these new farmers were forced off their land'.¹⁰⁵ This produced conflict with the prevailing postwar sentiment of 'doing the best for the returned heroes'. Those who survived were faced with a decade which Brooking described as characterised by 'disillusionment and political instability as well as economic insecurity'.¹⁰⁶ Brooking claimed that faith in the virtue of hard work clouded the political and community perception of the practicality of certain land schemes.¹⁰⁷

Jane Thompson's Ph.D thesis on the rehabilitation of World War Two returned soldiers presented a lengthy, though jaundiced, review of the World War I scheme in setting the scene for the 'successful' later scheme.¹⁰⁸ Thomson provided valuable insight into the psychology of the returned soldier and how, in New Zealand, this developed into projecting the veteran into 'favoured nation' status.¹⁰⁹ According to Thompson, the sacrifice of the men left the nation with debt that 'could never be redeemed but the repatriation scheme and war pensions represented an effort to make amends'.¹¹⁰ On the specifics of the soldier

pp.64-87.

¹⁰⁴ Tom Brooking, 'Economic Transformation', *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, W.H. Oliver with B.R. Williams (eds.), Wellington, 1981, pp.226-249.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p.227.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Thomson, 'The Rehabilitation of Servicemen'.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p.6.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

settlement scheme Thompson saw the influence of earlier closer settlement policies, however, unforeseen difficulties, especially the disastrous effects of land speculation, frustrated good intentions. She made a blanket claim that land was purchased at inflated prices and re-sold to soldiers without concern for the productive capacity of the farms, or the experience of the prospective farmers.¹¹¹ She presented figures similar to others quoted above. Thomson suggested that the Government succumbed to popular pressure and, despite protests by Lands and Survey officials about the poor quality of Crown Land, decided to settle men on much of what was virgin bush and only marginally productive land.¹¹² She claimed that 'they invested all they had...and though some prospered many struggled to make a bare living or...walked off their farms'.¹¹³ Thompson observed that the popular impulse to help returned soldiers was incompletely fulfilled and failure left, as Burdon had earlier commented, a strong residue of unassuaged guilt and pity.¹¹⁴

In *A Vision Betrayed*, Tony Simpson reproduced the liberal/labour argument about the scheme and emphasised the plight of the soldier settlers being a consequence of the operations of speculators in the land market, a position, according to Simpson, brought about by the Reform Government's decision to open the land market up for investment purposes in 1913.¹¹⁵ Following the slump of 1921, Simpson claimed, the Government was not interested in adjusting land values because of its members' vested interests in land. A strongly anti-conservative view was presented and he saw the period of Reform undoing the good work of the Liberals.

In the most recent general economic history, *The Making of New Zealand*, G.R. Hawke discussed the soldier settlers in his chapter 'The consequences of

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p.24.

¹¹² *ibid.*, p.25.

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.27.

¹¹⁵ Tony Simpson, *A Vision Betrayed: The Decline of Democracy in New Zealand*, Auckland, 1984, p.157.

refrigeration, 1890-1930'.¹¹⁶ He suggested that the period of rising commodity prices during the war pushed up the price of land just at the time the Government's Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act was 'injecting purchasing power into the land market'.¹¹⁷ The result was that land price levels rose beyond the productive capability of the land to service the debt levels.¹¹⁸ Those soldier settlers with the necessary skills and aptitude found themselves, after the slump of 1921, pressured by falling commodity prices and high fixed debt interest based on inflated land prices. Those without the necessary skills and ability [soldier settlers?] 'had' according to Hawke, 'no chance at all'.¹¹⁹

Two individual soldier settlements have been the subject of books. Arthur Bates' book, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, chronicled the establishment and eventual demise of what is New Zealand's most famous soldier settlement - the Mangapurua settlement on the upper Wanganui river.¹²⁰ This settlement best exemplifies the current popular image of the soldier settlements. The forty ex-servicemen were apparently let loose on isolated virgin country without much assistance and had to fight a continuous battle against the environment, the economy, and the Department of Lands and Survey. Bates relied heavily upon written and verbal accounts from four of the settlers. He covered their struggles to establish farms and the problems of transport and communication, which were of major proportions. The first settlers were surveying the valley over Christmas 1916 and settlement began in mid-1917. The settlement had progressed well up to early 1920 when some of the returned soldiers began to have doubts about the financial viability of clearing large areas of bush land (despite receiving the land rent-free). The high point of the settlement was around 1926, but from then on the valley was abandoned, with the

¹¹⁶ G.R. Hawke, *The Making of New Zealand: An Economic History*, Cambridge, 1985.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.101.

¹¹⁸ This contrasts with Belshaw's claim that purchase prices were never commensurate with commodity prices. Belshaw, 'Agricultural Credit and the Control of Land Values', p.78.

¹¹⁹ Hawke, *The Making of New Zealand*, p.101.

¹²⁰ Arthur P. Bates, *The Bridge To Nowhere: The ill-fated Mangapurua Settlement, Wanganui*, 1981.

last Crown lessees departing in the early 1940s after the Government withdrew further public works funding for the roads and bridges. This was only a short time after the famous concrete 'bridge to nowhere' had been completed. The valley has now reverted to bush. The story of Mangapurua cannot be used to generalise about the settlement scheme which covered almost all types of terrain and climate in the country.

The recent *Soldiers of the Mangateparu*, by Sidney M. Perry, is a timely and useful addition to the historiography of soldier settlement and is an example of the methodology required to fully understand the dynamics of the larger Crown settlements.¹²¹ Mangateparu, on dairying land near Morrinsville in Waikato, contained sixty sections and was the largest soldier settlement in the country. However, as with many local histories this is essentially a book laudatory of the efforts of the families involved on the settlement and lacks critical analysis. The book covers the early establishment years with the privations and difficulties involved, followed by the better years towards the end of the 1920s, the set-back of the depression and the eventual period of 'making good' before retirement on capital gains after years of hard work. What are particularly useful are brief sketches of the ownership and operation of each of the sections.

Although our primary images of the soldier settlement scheme have been formed by the print media, the more recent popular dissemination of the image of the scheme (essentially based on central North Island bush land) has come from television.¹²² Kenneth Cumberland's 1981 television series 'Landmarks', and the accompanying book of the same name, brought a version of the soldier settlement story to more people than perhaps any of the previously quoted publications.¹²³ Drawing heavily upon these works, the image presented was of many thousands of

¹²¹ Sidney M. Perry, *Soldiers of the Mangateparu*, Tauranga, 1990.

¹²² Television New Zealand's 'Country Calendar' produced a programme in the mid-1980s looking at the reversion of inland Taranaki settlement land, while publicity of the experience of New Zealand's best known 'walked off' soldier settler, Rewi Alley, has reinforced the bush-centric view of the scheme. For Alley see also W. Airey, *A Learner in China*, Christchurch, 1970.

¹²³ Kenneth Cumberland, *Landmarks*, Surry Hills, 1981.

soldiers being settled on the land. We were told that not only were 23,000 men assisted by government finance but that other men were helped by a grateful nation to settle leasehold land for which the state itself paid too much. Notwithstanding this large total, it was claimed that 9,000 soldiers had been settled by the time the bubble burst in 1921.¹²⁴ Inaccuracies abound in the description of the scheme. The 1915 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act is confused with the provisions of the 1917 Amendment Act, while we were told that the soldiers were helped 'no matter how little experience they had of farming, or even of rural life'.¹²⁵ According to Cumberland this was highlighted by a selection process that sometimes took less than an hour.¹²⁶ The emphasis was placed upon the central North Island bush lands and, without reference to the individual agency of the settlers, it was stated that 'many of the buyers and lessees in this frantic rush for land found themselves on rough hill country, in virgin bush, remote, isolated and without roads'.¹²⁷ Two components of the traditional view are woven together here. Firstly, the inexperience and undercapitalisation of the soldiers is emphasised and, secondly, the overvalued and heavily mortgaged soldiers' land is equated with the virgin Crown Lease Land.¹²⁸ The problems faced were, according to Cumberland, such that even 'experienced and determined men' could not succeed. A slice of an early soldier settler's life as a bush pioneer was presented which highlighted all of the difficulties faced, while settlers' experiences in an inland Taranaki valley were used to show the larger context.¹²⁹ According to Cumberland:

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p.161.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, p.157.

¹²⁶ But once the applicants had presented their details to the examining Land Board the process of balloting was indeed quick, requiring only that numbered marbles be drawn and corresponding names be read out.

¹²⁷ Cumberland, *Landmarks*, p.157. Soldiers were required to confirm with the Land Board, prior to the ballot, that they had inspected the section and it was suitable for their requirements.

¹²⁸ Most Crown tenants on marginal second class land had their rent deferred for a period of up to four years from the date they took up their sections. Some 1,400 soldiers were settled in the Wellington Land District and fewer than 200 of these were settled in remote bush blocks. Areas around Ohingaiti and Mangaweka, although bush land settlement, were not isolated.

¹²⁹ Perhaps less than 1,000 of the 10,500 soldiers settled actually experienced life as the programme and book tried to generalise.

The state's attempt to put discharged soldiers on the land had clearly failed. Much more than half of the nation's generosity to its war heroes was money down the drain. It had bought only heartache and misery.¹³⁰

The outbreak of the Second World War, and the subsequent need to develop rehabilitation policies for veterans in a variety of countries, provoked some articles and pamphlets which reviewed the previous experience of veteran assistance and land settlement. Two Americans, writing in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* in 1944, were concerned with soldier settlement in the United States as outlined in the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, popularly known as the 'G.I. Bill'.¹³¹ They reviewed the post World War One schemes of the U.S.A., Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The New Zealand scheme rated only a couple of lines but was complemented on its wide range of assistance.¹³² D.G. Marshall, writing in 1946, observed that 'some of the reasons for the failure of veterans in the New Zealand scheme... are: the reoccurrence of disabilities, the poor type of land, the over-generosity in a financial sense, the lack of adequate trained personnel for administration, and finally the lack of practical farming experience on the part of the veteran'.¹³³ Marshall gave no indication of his sources for this information except to say they were unofficial, but this raises some significant issues particularly as he claimed that 'it seems almost impossible to get anyone in authority to give an unbiased picture in either New Zealand, or any other Dominion'.¹³⁴ He failed to consider the impact of the 1917 Discharged Soldiers' Amendment Act, and only presents figures relating to the acquisition of land by way of lease and right of purchase licence under the 1915 Act and the Land, and Land for Settlements Acts. He arrived at the figure of 4,112 men being settled

¹³⁰ Cumberland, *Landmarks*, p.161.

¹³¹ J.D. Black, and C.D. Hyson, 'Postwar Soldier Settlement', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, November, 1944, pp.1-35.

¹³² *ibid.*, p.8.

¹³³ D.G. Marshall, 'Soldier Settlement in the British Empire', *Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics*, 1946, pp.256-265.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

between 1915-1943 out of a total of 15,181 applications.¹³⁵ He implied that the high ratio of applications to approvals suggests a thorough screening process on the part of government agencies involved. Marshall did mention that 22,740 men had been granted loans totalling £23,403,000 up until 1932, and that approximately half this amount had been repaid by then, so making the cost of the scheme to the Government approximately £10 million. Marshall considered the New Zealand scheme liberal in its provision of land and financial aid, but also noted the difficulty in obtaining information and statistics on the scheme.¹³⁶

An explanation is required for the variety of figures quoted by various writers as to the scope and eventual perceived failure of the scheme. Estimates of the failure rate are made in some of the studies reviewed, but these are characterised by their lack of agreement. The annual report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement provided the source for most of the quoted figures. However, these were not straightforward and confused interpretation resulted. Writers seem to have felt obliged to quote figures, often taken out of context, to support their claims for failure of the land settlement scheme. These various figures are used to show several aspects of the scheme. The works that emerged in the 1930s cited the figure of around 20,000 soldiers being settled on the land. This large number has now come to be seen as indicative, not of the country's assistance to a large number of men but, rather, as the actions of a foolhardy Government encouraging the land boom. The often quoted statement by Morrell that 20,000 soldiers were let loose with £22 million fits this category. As noted above, Powell was confused on the number of soldiers settled under different aspects of the scheme. Conservative estimates of the number of soldiers settled, in the region of 4,000, referred to soldiers who were assisted specifically under the provisions of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act 1915, the Land Act, and Land for Settlements Acts, to acquire Crown Land by leasehold. The official figures are not helpful in that although some 10,500 soldiers were assisted, they were helped to acquire a total of some 9600 farms.

¹³⁵ These figures are found in the published reports of the Department of Lands and Survey. See Table 4 in chapter 15.

¹³⁶ Marshall, 'Soldier Settlement', p.262.

The totals in the region of 22,000 include the 10,500, plus some 12,000 men assisted with urban housing.

Chapman and Malone are technically correct when they quote a figure of 7,000 for the number of soldiers settled on farms up to May 1920.¹³⁷ However, the implication that this was near the total number helped is incorrect and, when compared to 1933 when 'fewer than 3,000 [were] left on the land', the indictment of the Reform Government's scheme is complete. They were, however, comparing figures from two different returns. The figure of 'fewer than 3,000' represents the number of soldiers assisted specifically under the special tenures section of the 1915 Act which in 1933 stood at 2,727. This figure had reached a high point in 1923 of 3,090. Figures available from archival sources and presented in chapter 15 below suggest 6,701 farms were still occupied by some 7,000 soldiers in 1934.

Boyack and Tolerton's suggestion that 29 per cent of the soldiers had failed by 1935 is based on Greig's Treasury report estimate of the number of soldier settlement mortgages then in the hands of civilians. This takes no account of the desire of individual soldiers wishing to leave the land, nor of the specific policy decision taken by the Government to allow civilians to take over existing soldier mortgages, rather than insisting that the soldier's mortgage be cleared on transfer. During difficult financial times it was thought that refinancing problems for the purchaser might have disadvantaged the soldier transferee. Taken against the fate of all farmers during the depression period a success rate of 71 per cent looks remarkably good.

This is the state of the study of soldier settlement after World War I - a scholarship which for the most part begins with a few statements made in publications in the 1930s which have been elaborated and massaged to reach different conclusions as

¹³⁷ Chapman and Malone, *New Zealand in the Twenties*, pp.5-6.

control of the discourse subsequently moved across the political spectrum. The exceptions in the case of the New Zealand historiography are the unpublished theses. Both Allen and Melling express reservations as to the degree of failure of the settlement scheme. These reservations arose from their investigation of primary sources - material necessarily eschewed by the generalists. In terms of the passage of this story over time chapter 15 will show that the contemporary Liberal/Labour, or opposition view of the scheme has become the dominant view as this fulfilled the healing role of assuaging some of the guilt that was felt.¹³⁸ This negative view of the efforts of the Reform Government had been Labour's stance on the issue from the 1919 election, and was cemented into place with the plans of the first Labour Government for the re-establishment of returned soldiers of World War II. A view highlighting the failure of the repatriation policies of the Reform Government was one with which general historians, in the absence of detailed study, have remained comfortable.¹³⁹

The study essentially follows a chronological approach. Section one, 'Swords into Ploughshares', reviews the hopes and expectations of the soldiers, the community, and the Government, for a future based upon a large number of the returning soldiers being settled as yeoman farmers on unused Crown Land and under-utilised private land. The condition of the soldiers' minds and health is also considered in light of the sense of obligation felt in the community to reward the nation's defenders. The Government's attempts at providing agricultural training for the soldiers, both in New Zealand and in the United Kingdom, will be shown to have been poorly thought-out, piece-meal initiatives, which were not supported by the soldiers. Chapter 4 investigates early policy development, culminating in the passing of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act, 1915, and the subsequent broadening of the legislation through to 1920.

¹³⁸ Burdon alludes to this residual guilt, and Jane Thompson builds upon this with her framework for the second World War scheme.

¹³⁹ Brooking, 'Agrarian Businessmen Organise', p.384.

Section two, 'The Promised Land', investigates the administrative mechanisms available to the Government, in light of a shortage of existing Crown Land, to acquire private land for settlement purposes. This section questions the notion that the Government was responsible for the post-war land boom because of its purchase policies. Examples of discerning purchase practices will be examined for several of the larger, well-known settlements. The role of the community in the purchase process will also be viewed and it will be shown that despite the degree of patriotic concern for the soldiers' future well-being, the attitude of the farming and land-owning community was essentially 'business as usual'.

Section three, 'The Return Home', deals with the actual processes of settlement and comparisons are made between the Hawkes Bay and Wellington Land Boards to highlight the regional variation in settlement policies implemented by these semi-autonomous bodies. Early problems associated with the settlement process are investigated, while the functions of the supervisory framework established to assist the soldiers and protect the State's investment are related to the soldier settlers' increasing sense of disillusionment and financial dependence.

Section four, 'Hope Deferred', takes the story of the soldiers through the interwar years from the depression in 1921. The special status of the soldiers and the relatively considerate actions of subsequent governments are a feature of this period of economic turmoil and uncertainty for the soldier settlers. A change of status for the soldier settlers, congruent with the election of the Labour Government in 1935, is related to the policies established by the Government to rehabilitate farming in general.

Section five, 'Last Post', discusses the notion of failure of the settlement scheme, and why this has become such a central component of New Zealand folklore. Figures are presented in tandem with archival evidence to show that the traditional view of failure associated with soldier land settlement requires reassessment.

A study of land settlement of Maori soldiers and Army nurses is provided in Appendices 1 and 2. Although not substantial in scope, the settlement of Maori soldiers has been denied in the historiography and, as such, merits comment. The success of Army nurses in obtaining farms was also on a small scale. The land settlement of both groups was insignificant in relation to the total number of soldiers assisted overall by the scheme. But that they were included justifies a review of the available evidence and a preliminary outline of their story.

SWORDS INTO PLOUGHSHARES

CHAPTER 2

HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS

The first-hand war experience of New Zealand soldiers, and the patriotism that presaged much of the discussion by civilians about soldiers in New Zealand, meant that both the soldiers and the community had high expectations of the repatriation schemes. A strong theme of obligation permeated the discussion of the soldier 'problem'.¹ This obligation on the part of New Zealand society to act sympathetically towards the soldiers became an article of faith for many politicians and those involved in community interest groups such as patriotic societies. For their part, the soldiers clearly had expectations of what society would do for them.² The subsequent inability of both the soldiers and the community to satisfy their respective needs coloured attitudes towards the official repatriation schemes.

The debate centred not only on what was best for the soldiers, but also on which agency was best able to deliver the country's reward to its heroes. Over time, original interest group and political objections and criticisms of the Government's repatriation policy in general, and the land settlement scheme in particular, have become the dominating images of the historical orthodoxy. The image of failure reflects not just the structural and economic problems associated with the scheme, but also gives the impression of residual guilt felt by New Zealand society that it had not fulfilled its perceived obligations towards the soldiers, obligations that had developed along with a sense of patriotism during the war.

¹ Burdon, *The New Dominion*, p.14.

² *ibid.*

New Zealand had a tradition of soldier settlement to call upon when anticipating the return of the soldiers from the World War I.³ Veterans of the New Zealand wars of the 1860s had received land grants on their discharge from the regiments of imperial troops or from the locally-raised militia. Some attempts had been made to provide land for the veterans of the South African war, but this was on a very small scale and only in the Te Kuiti area. There was nothing new in this procedure with precedents reaching back to the days of the Roman republic. The New Zealand tradition of looking to land settlement as a cure-all for society's ills meant that land became the natural focus for those interested in the repatriation of New Zealand veterans.⁴ In the 1916 Annual Report of the Department of Lands and Survey, the Undersecretary described advantages of the scheme for both the soldiers and the State by concluding that it matched the soldiers' desire for an open-air life, 'enamoured with the open-air life that a military campaign entails', and secured for the State settlement of the population in the country rather than the town.⁵

The period from August 1914 through to the introduction of the Bill authorising conscription in May of 1916 was one of upheaval in New Zealand. Issues of voluntarism and the need to maintain the flow of reinforcements to the

³ The First New Zealand Expeditionary Force of 8,500 men departed for the Middle East in October 1914. During the next four years progressive reinforcements of the New Zealand Division, first in the Middle East and then the Western Front, brought the total number of men who served overseas to some 100,000, including some 2300 Maori soldiers and 500 nurses, of whom 58,000 became casualties and 16,400 died. Another 24,000 served in the armed forces but did not leave New Zealand.

⁴ See Miles Fairburn, 'The Rural Myth and the New Urban Frontier: An Approach to New Zealand Social History, 1870-1940', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 9(1), 1975, pp.2-21. New Zealand was not exceptional in its view of the countryside as a cure for urban ills. Agrarianism had a strong following in the United States and was rooted in a rejection of the ills of 'modern' industrialised society and a belief that the land offered individuals the opportunity for a self-sufficient independent existence which was natural and good. See David B. Danbom, 'Romantic Agrarianism in Twentieth-Century America', *Agricultural History*, 65(4), 1991, pp.1-12.

⁵ Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1916, p.1. George Forbes, Liberal Member for Hurumui, told the House in July, 1917: 'There is no doubt that when it comes to the repatriation of the soldier we must look to land-settlement.... the big thing is to get the soldier on to the land, and we have got to use every endeavour to do it', *NZPD*, July 1917, p.657.

Expeditionary Force dominated the press and were leading concerns in the political arena. Although the politicians were unsure as to the length of the conflict, they confidently expected that the end would come quickly once the stalemate of trench warfare on the Western Front was broken by the decisive 'push' and subsequent 'break through'. This was expected in the summer of 1916 and resulted in the disaster of the battle on the Somme. The successful prosecution of the war was of primary concern, but the 'problem' of the returned soldiers and the need to make provision for them began to surface in the newspapers and through the public utterances of politicians soon after the baptism of fire on Gallipoli in April 1915, and the subsequent arrival home of the first wounded on the *Willochra* in July 1915.

Quite apart from the need to provide material comfort and accommodation for wounded and ill soldiers, the debate that occurred 'about' the soldiers pointed towards the development in the public mind of a special class of people for whom the subsequent vagaries of life would be the nation's care. For example, the Mayor of Auckland was reported as saying that 'the men who comprised the expeditionary force would never be forgotten. A grateful citizenship would see that recognition was given them'.⁶

During debate on the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Bill in 1915, one Member of the House saw the settlement of soldiers in colonies around the country where the patriotic ideals of democracy and citizenship would be nurtured; the soldiers would constitute 'the finest citizens in the land, because they were not afraid... to go forth and do their duty like men'.⁷

⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 6 May 1919, p.8.

⁷ *NZPD*, 24 September, 1915, p.218.

The war experience of the soldiers clearly marked them out for special treatment. They were deserving of 'a just and generous proof of gratitude'.⁸ The rhetoric from these earliest discussions contained references to the land and soil of New Zealand as both fair compensation and as a component of the repatriation process:

No one should grudge them a share of the soil which many have died to protect. Even those whose health is so shattered that they can never return to their former occupations would feel that the people of New Zealand truly valued their services if they were given only an acre of ground to which they could retire and by which they could add a little to the pension allotted them. If it is possible I should like to see every man who has gone to the front given a free share of our territory.⁹

But various interest groups also used the issue of the soldiers to further their own causes. The conservative New Zealand Farmers' Union suggested that when the wounded soldiers had recovered they could be employed on farms. 'This is one way in which we can show our appreciation of the men who have gone to fight for our dominion'.¹⁰ The soldiers were not to be land-owners under this proposal, but rather rural workers to relieve farmers of the difficulty of obtaining labour.¹¹

For the proponents of closer settlement, the prospect of the returning soldiers being the shock troops in the battle against the large estate holders was very enticing. A new moral component had now been added to the debate on access to the land which had been simmering since the first arrival of European colonists in the mid-nineteenth century. The *Evening Post* observed in March 1916:

The argument for closer settlement under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act is patriotic as well as economic. No land owner

⁸ L.S. Fanning (ed.), *Winning Through from War to Peace*, Wellington, 1919, p.1. This was essentially a piece of Reform Party propaganda describing the great success of the repatriation scheme. Fanning appeared to be a lackey of the party. See P.S. O'Connor, 'Some Political Preoccupations of Mr Massey, 1918-1920', *Political Science*, 18(2), 1966, p.31.

⁹ Letter to the Editor, *Dominion*, 25 June, 1915. ✓

¹⁰ *The New Zealand Farmer Stock and Station Journal*, November, 1915, p.1514.

¹¹ J.B. Condliffe, 'New Zealand During The War', *The Economic Journal*, 29, March 1919, p.176.

would dare oppose it openly.... Is he not impelled to help provide land for the men who have defended it.¹²

This same newspaper would later suggest: 'War service has given thousands of would-be rural settlers a moral claim upon the community such as they never had before'.¹³ The Wellington Chamber of Commerce stated that the settlement of the land should be recognised as the paramount domestic problem of the Dominion. An *Auckland Weekly News* editorial noted that the New Zealand soldiers had 'earned so well the right to a homestead in the land for which they have fought'.¹⁴ A writer in the *New Zealand Farmer* was concerned that the New Zealand soldiers overseas would be tempted to settle in other lands unless something was done to attract them back to their own country.¹⁵ Speaking to the 1917 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Bill, one Member of Parliament expressed a commonly held view that the soldiers were better in the country than crowding into the cities.¹⁶

It was not surprising that the focus of attention should have been the land for the rural myth, as it was understood, saw life in the country as far better for both the individual and the state.¹⁷ Tony Simpson has observed of the rural myth that:

it was, and remains, a powerful political solvent in which otherwise easily identifiable political differences within rural societies quickly dissolve, disguising farming, which is a commercial operation like any other, as a desirable social activity in which all virtues reside and in which turning a profit is apparently an ancillary coincidence.¹⁸

¹² *Evening Post*, 4 March 1916, clipping on L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

¹³ *ibid.*, 16 May 1916.

¹⁴ *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 January 1917, p.47.

¹⁵ *The New Zealand Farmer Stock and Station Journal*, May 1915, p.664.

¹⁶ E. Newman, *NZPD*, 12 October 1917, p.42.

¹⁷ See Fairburn, 'The Rural Myth', pp.2-21.

¹⁸ Simpson, *A Vision Betrayed*, p.154.

Related to this concern that soldiers should return to the land was a strong eugenic underpinning. The main-body of the army were referred to on its departure as, 'a force of...well-trained men of splendid physique'.¹⁹ Dr Thacker, Liberal member for Christchurch East, observed in Parliament that 'The men are coming back virile, and strong, and keen; they will infuse new blood into the dormant blood of the Dominion. We are not going to give a lead to them; they are going to give a lead to us'.²⁰ This statement is very suggestive of the terms in which the war experience was perceived in New Zealand. The men returning had in fact been part of the presumably 'dormant' Dominion prior to the war, so the act of combat appears to have been perceived as the reinvigorating component.

Participation in combat, and later simply service in the army, seemed sufficient to establish the soldiers' pedigree to be settlers and farmers, notwithstanding that as the war progressed most of the soldiers came from urban environments.²¹

Through their war service soldiers had acquired the necessary virtue, in terms of Miles Fairburn's New Zealand Arcadian model, 'for the moral justification of the possession of property'.²² The soldiers had become the embodiment of the yeoman ideal and so much was expected of them. The *Auckland Weekly News* observed:

Modern war, with its incessant trench work and its imperative call upon the energy, the intelligence, and the resourcefulness of the soldier, is a hard and effective training school from which a magnificent yeomanry will emerge if adequate opportunity be provided for its establishment on the land.²³

¹⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, cited in Christopher Pugsley, *On The Fringe Of Hell: New Zealanders and Military Discipline in the First World War*, Auckland, 1991, p.22.

²⁰ *NZPD*, 12 October 1917, p.96.

²¹ A voice of reason in the 'agrarian wilderness' was provided by W.A. Cox, a member of the Advisory Board of the Federation of New Zealand Patriotic War Relief Societies, who observed: 'There are many soldiers who could not possibly make a success of farming or any other industries in connection with the land, and to place such soldiers on the land would mean they would make an utter failure of it', *Dominion*, 15 September 1916, clipping on Internal Affairs file 29/15/6, NA.

²² Fairburn, *The Ideal Society*, p.264.

²³ *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 January 1917, p.47.

The *Weekly News* repeated this theme later in 1917 by expecting soldiers who returned from the front in, 'prime physical condition... to be just the material we require to continue the battle that is necessary to convert the primeval forests into fertile farms'.²⁴

The use of the military metaphor reflects the gulf existing between the soldiers and the community at the time of the troops' discharge. It was highly unlikely that the soldiers saw themselves as the stuff for winning a second battle for the good of the country at this time, although this image would later be used as justification for their special treatment at the hands of the Department of Lands. The belief by civilians about the beneficial effects of the war indicate a complete misunderstanding of the modern industrial war which rendered the individual soldier powerless in the face of the machinery of battle and the tactics which developed around this.²⁵ In June 1917 the *Defender*, commenting upon the need to 'divert' the returning soldiers on to the back-blocks and away from the cities noted: 'the ANZAC spirit will carry them over any difficulties'.²⁶ In 1918, J. Read, former President of the Wellington Trades and Labour Council, expressed concern at the Government's policy of allowing men to settle isolated back-block farms after they had experienced the companionship of the army, and he proposed that large areas of agricultural land be acquired where returned men could be employed in large-scale production using 'all the latest mechanical devices'. He considered that the proper provision for the social side of life 'would make the rural life equally attractive as the urban and slow the drift to the towns'.²⁷ In this modernistic schema the soldiers were, it appears, going to continue to be disciplined cogs in a great machine, not of destruction, but production.

²⁴ *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 October 1917, p.43.

²⁵ The only New Zealand troops who provided a profile as yeoman were the mounted troops serving in Palestine who escaped the experience of the trenches. Despite the different nature of the warfare the mounted troops returned to New Zealand with a high incidence of malaria which severely affected their health in later years.

²⁶ *Defender*, June 1917, p.4.

²⁷ *Quick March*, 25 April 1918, p.21.

It might be suggested that the soldiers' memories of New Zealand had an impact on their post-armistice behaviour, and their expectations for the future. In leaving the battlefield and the old world as their forbears had, they were involved in a symbolic process of recovery and renewal. If the desire to leave Europe was as strong as the demobilization riots in the United Kingdom suggest, (with an end of service and enforced discipline), to what then did the soldiers imagine they were returning?²⁸

For the New Zealand soldier serving overseas, distant from New Zealand and without the prospect of home leave, the image of 'home' changed somewhat, and whereas the civilian population had expectations of the soldiers, so too did the soldiers have an expectation of the future. For those inclined to the land, sufficient information had filtered through for them to be aware of the provisions of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act, especially as approximately 80 per cent of the troops who served overseas left after the passing of the Act in 1915. It was later claimed that Prime Minister Massey promised the soldiers in France that they would be provided with farms on their return to New Zealand.

²⁸ For riots by New Zealand troops see: Nicholas Boyack, *Behind The Lines: The Lives of New Zealand Soldiers in the First World War*, Wellington, 1989, pp.147-208; Pugsley, *On the Fringe of Hell*, pp.283-293. Demobilisation riots were not solely confined to New Zealanders: See Desmond Morton, 'Kicking and Complaining: Demobilization Riots in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1918-19', *Canadian Historical Review*, 61(3), 1980, pp.334-360.



Returned Soldier: "And these are some of the people I have been fighting for!"

With apologies to "Country Gentleman."

Source: *New Zealand Farmer, Stock and Station Journal*, April 1919, p:502.

This is a particularly strong image of the moral virtue residing in the returned soldier. Of upright bearing, he is nonetheless, pinched of face and clenched of fist. The comparison between those that served and those that had not is obvious.

The horrors of the front line and the inversion of the natural order by the shelling may have made the prospect of farm life in New Zealand very appealing.²⁹

He saw beyond the murdered earth
And moaning of the tortured skies,
the promise of his land of birth,
a dream-home to his weary eyes.³⁰

Fear, speed and economy, it has been suggested, guided the policy for the demobilisation and reconstruction plans of the United Kingdom in 1919.³¹ These were, to a degree, essential components of the New Zealand experience. In terms of the fear of the political instability that the soldiers might have introduced, resulting from their experience of war, the more obvious evidence, such as public disorder,³² or the expression of strong socialist sympathies, is lacking.³³ In 1920 the RSA was justifying increased land settlement for soldiers on the grounds that 'a large rural population of contented people is the country's greatest assurance against internal and external strife'.³⁴ The Minister-in-Charge of the Discharged Soldiers' Information Department outlined the Government's attitude towards the soldiers and the motivating desire for speed:

We consider that it is the duty of the State to assist the returned soldier to escape as soon as possible from his military environment, and to find a suitable niche in the general social life of the

²⁹ For an investigation of soldiers' views on nature see Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, London, 1975, pp.231-269.

³⁰ Alan Mulgan, 'Soldier Settlement', in *New Zealand Farm and Station Verse, 1850-1950*, A.E. Woodhouse (ed.), Christchurch, 1950, pp.84-85.

³¹ Johnson, *Land Fit For Heroes*, p.299.

³² The soldiers did demonstrate in support of their claims for a gratuity payment in excess of that offered by the Government, and a Wellington meeting resulted in a riot outside Parliament where 2500 soldiers wanted to 'personally' inform Massey of their grievances, Burdon, *The New Dominion*, p.27.

³³ John A Lee and the Labour party might count in this regard. They were, however, working within the established parliamentary structure. In August 1920, the RSA threatened Massey that the soldiers were being forced by delays in the soldier settlement programme to turn their attentions towards the [Labour] party, 'which during the war was anything but loyal'. Transcript of the Deputation of the Executive of the RSA to Prime Minister Massey, and David Guthrie, Minister of Lands, 31 August 1920, L&S file 26/1-7, NA.

³⁴ RSA Land Committee minutes, book 7, p.8, RSA Headquarters, Wellington.

community for him. We recognise that the sooner that can be brought about the better it will be for the soldier and the better it will be for the State.³⁵

Similar sentiments were expressed in the Report of the Defence Expenditure Commission which noted that after previous wars it had been found difficult to get soldiers to settle down on their return home, and that:

It therefore seems unkind in the returned soldiers' best interests to pamper them, and thereby loosen the fibre of some, and transform gallant, efficient fellows into dependants. The kindest thing would seem to be to return all possible, without delay, into the walks of life they previously followed. Too much so-called kindness and consideration simply prolong, and ultimately make permanent, their restlessness.³⁶

Unlike any other event, the war brought to the surface of New Zealand society a sense of nationhood and pride. The implications of this in regard to the development of a national identity have been canvassed by other writers, who have emphasised that the soldier embodied the ideals and the hopes for the future.³⁷ But there also appears a train of ambivalence in society's attitudes towards the soldiers. In part this was as a result of the role played by censorship and propaganda in blurring the realities of the soldiers' war experience. An American writer of the time observed of this:

The soldier has come back. For the most part the world has been sadly disappointed in him. It has recognized its idealization of him - its extravagant praise of heroism, devotion, sacrifice, consecration to the ideal, etc. - as a passing phase of its war psychosis.³⁸

Although it was not until the late 1920s that the real nature of the soldiers' experience found an outlet in literature that emerged with publication of

³⁵ A.L. Herdman, *NZPD*, 11 October 1917, p.44.

³⁶ Report of the Defence Expenditure Commission, *AJHR*, H.19c, 1918, pp.58-59.

³⁷ See Phillips, *A Man's Country?*, p.165; Sinclair, *A Destiny Apart*, pp.156-173, 184.

³⁸ Ralph M. Eaton, 'The Social Unrest of the Soldier', *International Journal of Ethics*, 21(2), 1921, p.279.

Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, rumours of VD and knowledge of alcohol abuse were sufficient to cause widespread unease.³⁹ New Zealand soldiers were the personification of the nineteenth-century larrikins with emphasis on the disruptive aspects of the male culture.⁴⁰ However, a desire for the soldiers to be legitimate heroes in the classical Greek mould was sufficiently strong, in an ideological sense, to survive the upheavals of the interwar period and to become part of national mythology.⁴¹ Despite this, at the practical level the divergence of soldiers' experience *vis-à-vis* the civilian population resulted in both groups harbouring unfulfilled hopes and expectations. An insurmountable barrier existed between those who had served and those who had not which no amount of repatriation assistance could break down. A Member of the Legislative Council articulated this when he observed:

We are met with a new position altogether in the history of our country. We have a proportion of what might be termed new citizens altogether - new citizens because of the experience they have undergone, new citizens because of the altered conditions they will find in this country on their return.... We send... men to new countries to fight the battle of Empire. They gain a new outlook on life altogether, and when they come back to our own country they find that the conditions have changed internally.⁴²

Gordon Coates, Member of Parliament for Kaipara, was moved to observe on his return from overseas service that, despite the soldiers' experiences, some results of which had to be eradicated, the average soldier was not only going to become a better citizen because of his experience but, if properly handled, would become a tremendous force for change in the Dominion.⁴³ Understandably, Coates was expressing the Army's view and, more importantly, an officer's view. It was the type of information that the community wanted to hear, something of which Coates

³⁹ Jane Tolerton, *Ettie: A Life of Ettie Rout*, Auckland, 1992, pp.195-196.

⁴⁰ Phillips, *A Man's Country?*, pp.187-191.

⁴¹ Maureen Sharpe, 'Anzac Day in New Zealand 1916-1939', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 15(2), 1981, pp.97-114.

⁴² *NZPD*, 16 October 1917, p.198.

⁴³ *New Zealand Herald*, 6 May 1919, p.8.

the politician was well aware. But it also reflected in the New Zealand context, a phenomenon Paul Johnson identified in the United Kingdom reconstruction debate, and that was the expectation by those whom Johnson calls 'reconstructionists' that not only was a new era of reform imminent, but also that the war was the main cause.⁴⁴

In May 1919 General G.S. Richardson, who had been Officer-in-Charge of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force administration in the United Kingdom, returned to a rapturous reception in Auckland. In his speech in reply to his welcome at the Auckland Town Hall, Richardson alluded to the need for an integrated scheme of repatriation which, he considered, was a duty that society owed the soldier. This was particularly important because, as Richardson observed, practically every soldier who was discharged was disabled either physically or mentally.⁴⁵ He claimed that 'the men did not want to be spoon-fed, nor did they require anything to which they were not entitled'.⁴⁶

Perhaps the most telling point made by Richardson, and one which affected the whole of the repatriation effort, was that although the country had been sending men overseas for more than four years it had only a few months in which to

⁴⁴ Johnson, *Land Fit for Heroes*, p.220. It has been noted of the British army that there was a strong feeling that things should improve at home after the war and that this was a product of the propaganda campaign which emphasised the rewards of success so as 'to keep the toilers resolute in persecuting the war', Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, Cambridge, 1986, p.802.

⁴⁵ It is now recognised that combat places extreme psychological pressure on participants with long-term problems related to post traumatic shock disorder. During and after World War I these problems were referred to as neurasthenia or shell shock. This was popularly, and incorrectly, perceived as concussion of the brain and was thought to have resulted from the incessant shelling that the soldiers were subject to. The real cause was the unusually high levels of stress which the soldiers faced over a long period of time. Research from the Vietnam experience showed that the individual soldier harboured problems resulting from the attempt to deny the trauma experience and created a neurotic coping mechanism that allowed him to function. A by-product of this was that the soldier was unable to articulate his experience and, in fact, felt that society could not possibly understand that he had changed in a very fundamental, if indescribable way. The problems of 'shell shock' became manifest for the soldiers of World War I as a lethargy and inability, or unwillingness, to continue to be involved with the State apparatus which had sent them to war. The Wellington War Relief Association reported to Massey that a proposed leaflet on the intended land scheme 'must be as free from technicalities as possible, as it is found that the returned soldier has difficulty in following anything that is at all involved'. L&S file, 13/25-2, NA.

⁴⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 6 May 1919, p.8.

reintegrate them into society. This reintegration was, according to Richardson, as much a duty of the citizens of the country as it was of the Government.⁴⁷ The notion of how Richardson's 'entitlement' should be perceived by the wider community also concerned the soldiers. An early soldier settler in Southland wrote to a local newspaper outlining the restrictions under which the soldier settlers operated and emphasising that the soldiers were not receiving charity as some in the community were suggesting.⁴⁸ In 1918 the Defence Commission claimed:

Some men, encouraged by the adulation accorded them on their return from the war by an appreciative public, come to think that, having been at the front, the country should keep them and their families for the rest of their lives. This erroneous idea should be corrected, and the sooner such an impression is removed the better for the soldier and the community.⁴⁹

Despite this, there was already established within the community a structure for providing assistance, while the Southland soldier's concern that he not be seen as a charity recipient also had a community manifestation. Prior to the return of a substantial number of wounded soldiers, the community had established mechanisms for dispersing aid and relief to soldiers and their families. This action was not seen as charity, but rather as recognition for services rendered. In response to the wave of patriotism and jingoistic sentiment that swept the country during the early months of the war, the population indulged in an enthusiastic establishment of a myriad of patriotic organisations.⁵⁰ What started out as the provision of comforts and luxuries for the members of the Expeditionary Force matured into a group of fund-raising organisations under the wing of an advisory board reporting to the Minister of Internal Affairs. The structure of these organisations was essentially bureaucratic and conservative. The concern was to husband the resources under their control for 'the obsessive need to provide welfare for "our

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Southland Daily News*, 7 November 1916, clipping on L&S file 26/1-2, NA.

⁴⁹ Report of the Defence Expenditure Commission, *AJHR*, H.19c, 1918, pp.58-59.

⁵⁰ G. Hucker, 'When The Empire Calls: Patriotic organisations in New Zealand during the Great War', MA thesis in History, Massey University, 1979, p.16.

boys" and their dependents'.⁵¹ The notion of the country having a duty to provide for the soldiers was a strong one. As a newspaper editor observed:

It has been persistently stated in public print and on the public platform that the money subscribed for the needy and the wounded heroes was given as a duty, and there could be no suggestion of charity as between those who stayed behind and those who went to fight our battles.⁵²

The funds held by the patriotic societies were seen in government circles as supplementary to its contribution towards the repatriation of the soldiers. Speaking at a conference of representatives of patriotic societies in February 1916, G.W. Russell, the Minister of Internal Affairs, noted that assisting soldiers to purchase small farms was a legitimate object of expenditure from the patriotic funds. He observed:

it was never contemplated that the entire responsibility should vest in the state The question we have to settle is at what point the responsibility of the State shall end and that of societies begin.... Government pensions were never regarded as an expression of the entire responsibility of the people of the Dominion to the soldier and his dependents. The pension represents the payment of the State. The patriotic funds, on the other hand, represent the gifts of the people to supplement the State's pensions.⁵³

In reply to a statement in the House on the 1915 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Bill, Prime Minister Massey observed that patriotic funds raised in a particular district should be lent to soldier settlers from that district. The inference that the patriotic societies should provide a proportion of the funding for the land settlement scheme remained a factor until 1917, when the Wellington War Relief Association's annual report noted that no society could afford the large sums involved and that they would better serve the returning soldiers by helping them to return to former jobs or establish businesses in the cities where the Government

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.19.

⁵² *Southland Daily News*, 25 January 1916, clipping on Internal Affairs File 29/15/3, NA.

⁵³ *New Zealand Times*, 18 February 1916, clipping on Internal Affairs file 29/25/3, NA.

scheme did not operate.⁵⁴ The Oxford Patriotic Committee decided that the funds it administered were raised for the benefit of disabled soldiers and to help the dependents of soldiers and, as such, were not to be used to finance able-bodied men on to the land. The Committee urged the Canterbury Patriotic Association to impress upon the Government 'its national duty of settling soldiers upon the land'.⁵⁵

The patriotic societies also expressed ambivalence toward the Government's plans for the land settlement of returned soldiers. The Hawkes Bay War Relief Association was reported as stating: 'it is considered generally among patriotic bodies that the National Efficiency Board should deal with the matter of settling soldiers on the land and in business'.⁵⁶ The National Efficiency Board was established in early 1917 to carry out a number of duties in the areas of business organisation, human resource management, the provision of strategic economic advice to government, and operating the businesses and farms of soldiers' at the front through a committee network of trustees.⁵⁷ That the interests of patriotic societies and the National Efficiency Board should coincide is not surprising, allowing for the continuity of people involved in the operations of the two organisations. The chairman of the Wellington War Relief Association, William Ferguson, was also Chairman of the National Efficiency Board. This continuity of interested individuals also extended to the membership of the local Land Boards, the county and borough councils, and chambers of commerce, to name a few of the more influential organisations.

A point of contention was between government control, with its red tape and bureaucracy, and the more 'genuine and thoughtful' involvement of 'practical' people through bodies such as the National Efficiency Board and the patriotic societies. Suspicion of the ability of public servants adequately to minister to the

⁵⁴ Wellington War Relief Association 2nd Report, 1917, p.5. WTU.

⁵⁵ *Lyttelton Daily Times*, 13 June 1917, clipping on L&S file 26/1-3, NA..

⁵⁶ *Hawkes Bay Tribune*, 5 June 1917, clipping on L&S File 26/1-3. NA.

⁵⁷ Reports and Memoranda of the National Efficiency Board, *AJHR*, H.34, 1917.

problems of returned soldiers remained a feature of the land settlement debate throughout the war, and into the 1920s.

To supervise the war relief funds the Department of Internal Affairs established an advisory board, but its relationship with the patriotic societies was stressful. During his tenure as Minister of Lands during Massey's absence, Sir Francis Bell saw the patriotic societies as interfering with the orderly settlement of soldiers on the land. He claimed that the societies were creating dissatisfaction by making extravagant claims on behalf of the soldiers - claims that the soldiers themselves would not have thought of. Sir Francis claimed that rather than speaking for the soldiers, the patriotic societies were motivated by the sole object of preserving their trust funds.⁵⁸ The marriage of government and private assistance did not occur until the establishment of the Repatriation Department in 1919, when local Repatriation Committees were established in most communities.

From the Armistice through to mid-1919 considerable dissatisfaction had been voiced in the community over the unpreparedness of government schemes to meet the anticipated demands from soldiers who were returning in large numbers. Criticism focused on the structure of the Repatriation Department, with its supervision being the preserve of four independent ministers. The Central Board of the Repatriation Department reportedly gave an impression of possessing no policy for dealing with the soldiers, and a request to regional boards and committees for advice and suggestions was interpreted by the *Round Table* as a dereliction of responsibility on the part of the Government.⁵⁹

Despite the establishment of the local Repatriation Committees, and the initial desire of the Government to include the wider society in the process of land settlement for soldiers through the agencies of the patriotic societies, the actual land settlement scheme, as it developed, remained the almost exclusive preserve of

⁵⁸ NZPD, 16 October 1917, pp.202-203.

⁵⁹ *Round Table*, March 1919, p.643.

the Lands and Survey Department. There were exceptions based on the 1917 Amendment Act, and both the repatriation committees and the local patriotic societies provided some financial assistance to soldier settlers.

The adoption by the Government of the role of primary distributor of the nation's reward to the soldiers subjected it to an almost unparalleled degree of scrutiny and criticism. In the case of the land scheme, this intense interest by various groups and organisations revealed the problematic nature of organised land settlement and some of the structural weaknesses of the existing machinery of settlement.

Underpinning the scheme was the moral component of the soldiers' case, which could not allow the community to see them as other than especially deserving, yet the issue of the suitability of the soldiers as the raw material for land settlement was one that did not generate any comparable debate.

CHAPTER 3

PREPARATION FOR A RURAL FUTURE

Farming more than any other occupation demands knowledge, experience, and a certain degree of adaptability, and it is only courting failure to undertake a new and intricate business without serving some apprenticeship to it.¹

The orthodoxy suggests that for the most part the soldier settlers were young and inexperienced, and it is implied that it was inexcusable of the Reform Government to have consigned these men to a vocation for which so many were ill-prepared. The Government was not unaware of the difficulties, however, and its ongoing plans for soldier settlement after World War I had included an agricultural training component. The debate over soldier settlement during the war had touched on the likely farming inexperience of returning soldiers, although this discussion was also related to longer running concerns about the establishment of institutional agricultural education in New Zealand.² There was, however, an inherent contradiction in the belief of New Zealand as a rural Arcadia where the fruits of the land were available for picking, and the need to 'train' individuals to harvest this fruit. Despite the utterances of the New Zealand authorities at home, very little was achieved during the course of the war to provide training facilities for the 25,000 men who returned prior to the armistice. The official stance was that the soldiers did not wish to avail themselves of the facilities, albeit limited, that were provided.

¹ *The New Zealand Farmer Stock and Station Journal*, October 1919, p.1401.

² See T.W.H. Brooking, *Massey: Its Early Years*, Palmerston North, 1977, chapter 1.

Following the armistice discharged soldiers who wished to have training in agriculture were dealt with by two schemes provided by the Repatriation Department. The first involved subsidised attendance at state farms, while the second provided a subsistence allowance for the soldier to take employment with a farmer on the understanding that practical experience would be gained. Dovetailing into this were the initiatives of several patriotic organisations which provided funds to acquire land to establish training farms. The Repatriation Department also established a special farm for the instruction of infectious tubercular patients. An independent initiative came from the New Zealand Army authorities in France and the United Kingdom where, early in 1918, a diverse educational programme was put in place for the soldiers, including instruction in agricultural subjects. This was continued on the troopships returning soldiers to New Zealand. Those soldiers who remained in the army on arrival in New Zealand for reasons of health recuperation, were offered short instruction courses at hospitals, while more extensive facilities were eventually provided at sanatoria for longer stay tubercular patients.

What appeared to be a substantial programme to assist soldiers before and after discharge was in fact a flimsy affair, poorly co-ordinated, beset with problems caused by administrative indecision, lack of resources and undermined by the attitudes of the prospective soldier students. Success was negligible with only a small minority of returned soldiers taking up the limited opportunities offered. It is difficult to estimate the number of soldiers who took part in the various post-discharge agricultural initiatives, but in March 1922, David Guthrie, the Minister of Lands, reported that, to date, only 962 men had received agricultural training.³ No clear estimate can be made of the serving soldiers who received agricultural training. Brigadier-General G.S. Richardson noted in 1923 that 6,834 soldiers in France, 13,152 soldiers in the United Kingdom and 1,127 troopers in Egypt had attended classes of some type and that the most popular were the agriculture

³ *Quick March*, 10 March 1922, p.39. This figure represents approximately 10 per cent of the total soldiers assisted under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act, but little information survives as to the number who took up farms after training.

classes.⁴ The training schemes might have been well-intentioned but they suffered from a lack of uniformity, while their organisation and the conditions under which training was to occur generated considerable confusion within government circles. No clear policy emerged. The training debate also revealed sharp philosophical conflict between those who favoured theoretical training and those supporting practical training on either private farms or special blocks of Crown Land.⁵ In each case different agendas were being served that actually had little to do with preparing the men for a rural future. Deep-seated beliefs about the nature of the New Zealand rural environment, and more immediate issues related to the booming land market, worked against the successful implementation of an effective agricultural educational programme.

In parliamentary debates on the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act in 1915, and the 1916 Amendment Act, concerns were raised about the need to train those men who might return disabled, and whose best prospects for the future were seen to be in light farming. Activities such as fruit and vegetable growing, bee-keeping and poultry-raising were seen as appropriate and it was anticipated training could be provided by the existing state farms.⁶ In April 1916 the Department of Lands sought information as to the arrangements, 'if any', that the Department of

⁴ Brigadier-General G.S. Richardson, 'Education in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force', *The War Effort of New Zealand, Official History of New Zealand's Effort in the Great War*, H.T.B. Drew, (ed.), Auckland, 1923, p.231.

⁵ A case of a compromise plan was reported in the *New Zealand Herald*, 6 May 1919. The Industrial and Disabled Soldiers' Committee of the Auckland Repatriation Board advocated training inexperienced men before letting them loose on the land and it was reported that the committee was making arrangements for a trust farm at Papatoetoe to be used. The Committee suggested that training be alternated week to week between practical work, and theoretical and scientific work, and that up to sixty soldiers at a time could be accommodated. By October 1919 the plan had changed into one to both provide practical training for the soldiers, and settlement of virgin country in the North Auckland Land District. *The New Zealand Farmer Stock and Station Journal*, October 1919, p.1390.

⁶ These farms had their genesis under Edward Tregear, Secretary for Labour when the first was established at Levin in 1894. Their function was to teach basic manual farming skills to fit the unemployed to earn a living from the land. K.R. Howe, *Singer in a Songless Land: A Life of Edward Tregear 1846-1931*, Auckland, 1991, pp.79-80; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, Christchurch, 1908, p.1119.

Agriculture was making 'to teach discharged soldiers farming'.⁷ In May 1916, the Minister of Agriculture, W.D.S. MacDonald, outlined the role of the Department of Agriculture in what appeared to be a substantial programme for both training the soldiers on the state farms, and providing practical training on special development blocks. It was expected that inexperienced soldiers would be used to clear and fence virgin land.⁸ Massey had informed Sir James Allen, the Minister of Finance, that 'an arrangement' had been made with the Department of Agriculture for a limited number of soldiers to receive training at the seven state farms provided, however, that a class of instruction to suit the soldiers' requirements was available and that accommodation could be found in the locality.⁹ According to *The Soldiers' Guide*, the Department of Agriculture 'would provide free of charge, instruction in all forms of farming experience'.¹⁰ The intention was to place recuperating discharged soldiers at Ruakura state farm to learn skills related to lighter farming, while fit men went to Weraroa state farm in Levin. The authorities believed that a fair knowledge of farming could be obtained in six months. However, the provision of training for returned soldiers posed problems for the Department of Agriculture and the state farms.¹¹

At the same time as these farms were being considered for this educational role, their value as research and demonstration agencies was being questioned in a report prepared by the Board of Agriculture.¹² The commitment of the Department of Agriculture to pursuing the organisation and operation of the scheme must, however, be questioned in light of the comment by the Director-General of Agriculture that when the war was over and healthy men returned 'they would wish to train "on strictly practical methods"... instead of the more technical practice

⁷ Memo from Brodrick to The Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Industries and Commerce, 28 April 1916, L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

⁸ *New Zealand Farmer Stock and Station Journal*, May 1916, p.564.

⁹ Letter from Massey to Allen, 13 May 1916, L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

¹⁰ *Soldiers' Guide*, Wellington, 1917, p.43.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² L.J Wild, *The Life and Times of Sir James Wilson of Bulls*, Christchurch, 1953, p.160.

which existed on the state farms because of their experimental work'.¹³ These strictly practical methods appeared simply an extension of W.P. Reeves' proposals of the 1890s for the training of unemployed in the art of using shovels, spades, and axes so that they could secure a living from the land.¹⁴ The Board of Agriculture, which was an appointed body overseeing the operations of the Department of Agriculture, was of the opinion that only experienced men should be given access to the land, while inexperienced applicants were to be given the chance to obtain experience, preferably by making their own arrangements to work for farmers.¹⁵ Despite the Board's critical report of the state farms, and its expressed preference for practical training, Massey and Reform politicians generally continued to see the state farms as central components of plans to train discharged soldiers to be farmers.¹⁶

Lack of support for a formal agricultural education scheme was also apparent in the Department of Lands. Practical experience was seen as the best training. The Undersecretary informed Sir James Allen that, 'the men do not desire tuition in farming... but prefer to set to work in their own way'.¹⁷ The ambivalence of the Department is evident in a comment by Guthrie in September 1918 when, in response to a remit passed at the RSA conference, he said that he was not prepared to make training mandatory for inexperienced applicants as 'the experience of this [Lands] Department indicates that many men without previous training will make a

¹³ Memo from the Director-General of Agriculture, C.J. Reakes, to the Minister of Agriculture, Industries and Commerce, 10 October 1918, Agriculture Department file 59/6-14, 2736, NA. Reakes had earlier tendered advice to Brodrick that inexperienced men should obtain experience by working with established farmers. He made no reference to the role, if any, of the state farms. Memo from Reakes to Brodrick, 19 August 1918, L&S file 26/1-3, NA.

¹⁴ *Cyclopedia*, p.1119.

¹⁵ Memo from Reakes to Brodrick, 19 August 1918, Agriculture Department file 59/6-14, 2736, NA.

¹⁶ Linked with this was their expectation that officers of the Department of Agriculture would be heavily involved in all facets of the settlement scheme but in the period up until mid- 1919 the Department of Agriculture was experiencing the same wartime staffing difficulties as other departments, while also being subjected to a major restructuring by the Public Service Commissioner in 1918. Alan Henderson, with Roberta Nicholls, *The Quest for Efficiency: The Origins of the State Services Commission*, Wellington, 1990, p.86.

¹⁷ Memo from T.N. Brodrick to Sir James Allen, L&S file 26/1-3, NA.

success of farming'.¹⁸ In September 1919, after some 5000 men had taken up land, the Liberal Member for Patea told the House:

We must do the best we possibly can to put the soldiers on the land under favourable conditions, and we must have men to advise them and see that those who go on the land are taught at least the rudiments of farming. Some people think that farming is very simple. I am afraid that some of these men will find that it is not so simple.¹⁹

A Reform Member considered that the training provided by the state farms was too easy and 'cut and dried', and that the soldiers should be 'under some reputable farmer on farms where they will see the actual work and encounter the hardships which they themselves will be called upon to bear when working their own land'.²⁰ It may have been concern for the dominance of the 'practical experience', as opposed to 'formal education' lobby that prompted Professor T.A. Hunter to observe in 1919, that the existing settlement programme did not provide for the 'proper' training of those who wished to take up land, 'because farming was still looked upon as an unskilled occupation'.²¹ He also advocated establishment of farming colonies for training purposes.²²

Interest group proponents of colony-type settlement saw in their schemes advantages for the training of returned soldiers.

For instance, after consultation with the Auckland Agricultural and Pastoral Association and the Farmers' Union, the Auckland Patriotic Society's subcommittee on soldier land settlement noted in its 1917 annual report that the Government should train prospective soldier settlers by employing them to bring

¹⁸ *ibid.* In 1917 Guthrie claimed that from the earliest debates on the soldier settlement scheme he had advocated the setting up of training blocks in both the North and South Islands where inexperienced men could be trained 'under the supervision of a practical man'. *NZPD*, 11 October 1917, p.54.

¹⁹ *NZPD*, 3 September 1919, p.122.

²⁰ *NZPD*, 12 October 1917, p.94.

²¹ *Quick March*, January 1919, p.32.

²² *ibid.*

suitable land under cultivation, and allowing them to farm the land that they themselves had cleared.²³ The Te Awamutu Chamber of Commerce proposed a similar colony-type land development scheme for one thousand acres of hospital reserve land near Te Kawa.²⁴ These suggestions did not fall on deaf ears as the Government had been toying with the general idea of colony development. Massey had informed the House of Representatives in August 1917 that two blocks in the North Auckland land district were to be set apart for soldiers to clear and then have first option to purchase.²⁵ Brodrick estimated that up to 3000 soldiers could be employed on preparation of those blocks of land.²⁶ This may have been seen as providing a basic training in the process of bush clearance, but it was hardly preparation for commercial farming. The development colony proposal remained as a contingency policy of the Department of Lands until 1920,²⁷ and was regularly alluded to by the Minister of Lands as an example of the breadth of the Government's thinking in the face of mounting criticism, but it never got beyond the discussion stage.

The National Efficiency Board favoured a two-year training programme in practical farming for inexperienced soldiers, and considered that its local Boards around the country should be utilised to obtain positions for novice soldiers with established farmers. Being primarily concerned with financial efficiency, the Board felt that applicants for government assistance should have a minimum of two years experience on the land.²⁸ The Board also hinted at support for the colony-type development scheme, suggesting that the soldiers would be more content and successful if placed on lands on which a considerable amount of the development

²³ Auckland Provisional Patriotic and War Relief Association, annual report, 1917, p.13, WTU.

²⁴ Memo from Brodrick to the Minister of Lands, 19 September 1917, L&S file 26/2/9, NA.

²⁵ *NZPD*, 22 August 1917, p.525.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.526.

²⁷ In September 1920 a group of soldiers training at Ruakura wrote to Brodrick explaining that they were anxious to get on the land and were interested in a block that they could be employed on to break in and then be given preference in the subsequent ballot. L&S file 21/149, NA.

²⁸ Letter from William Ferguson, Chairman of the National Efficiency Board, to Massey, 10 December 1917, National Efficiency Board memoranda book, vol.1, Qms, WTU.

work had been undertaken by them.²⁹ It also objected to the 'faulty method' of placing inexperienced men on the land. The Chairman of the National Efficiency Board, William Ferguson, noted this in a letter to Sir James Allen in June 1918, which indicates that, despite Brodrick's assurances, Land Boards were in practice letting inexperienced men obtain soldier farms. But, as will be shown in a later chapter, the concept of what constituted previous experience in farming was nebulous and open to wide interpretation by both sympathetic Land Boards, and less than forthright soldiers and their supporters. It appears Massey was well aware of the shortcomings of the inexperienced soldier and he took to task those parliamentarians who, 'imagine that it would be possible to make a farmer out of every man that returns'.³⁰

The 1918 Defence Expenditure Commission addressed the question of land settlement and it observed: 'A popular cry is to put returned soldiers on farms; but, before putting men on the land, their fitness for that work should be thoroughly tested'.³¹ Before the Commission, the General-Secretary of the RSA, D.J.B. Seymour, had noted that prospective soldier settlers had to be carefully selected.³² As with other interested parties, the Army also saw the existing state farms as the basis of a training scheme that, while not providing a thorough agricultural education, would serve to show whether the soldiers had the aptitude and persistence to succeed.³³

This then was the debate, but what of the practical application of proposed training schemes? Independent of the domestic debate over the issue of agricultural training, were the plans and policies of the New Zealand Army in Europe. Its concern for the civilian future of the soldiers was motivated by a number of

²⁹ Letter from William Ferguson, Chairman of the National Efficiency Board, to Sir James Allen, 26 March 1917, National Efficiency Board memoranda book, vol.1, Qms, WTU.

³⁰ *NZPD*, 22 August 1917, p.525.

³¹ Memo from the Commandant of New Zealand forces to the Undersecretary for Lands, 7 August 1918, L&S file 26/1-4, NA; Report of the Defence Expenditure Commission, *AJHR*, H.19j, 1918.

³² *Quick March*, 25 May 1918, p.12.

³³ *ibid.*

factors, including the impact of the compulsion placed on men to serve in 1916. The efforts of the Army to provide agricultural training fall into two categories. First, a type of training activity was used for recuperative measures for wounded and ill soldiers. These activities were carried out at New Zealand Army hospitals and depots in the United Kingdom, and also in hospitals and sanatoria in New Zealand. Second, able-bodied men were provided with instruction in agriculture to prepare them for a civilian vocation. Prior to the armistice a substantial initiative to provide training for the soldiers' post-war vocations came from the New Zealand Expeditionary Force structure based in the United Kingdom under command of Brigadier-General G.S. Richardson.

From April 1916, when the New Zealand Expeditionary Force was transferred from the Middle East to France, New Zealand hospitals and depots had developed small garden plots to provide vegetables to supply messes and canteens. The scope of this was extended to provide light therapeutic work. At the New Zealand Mechanical Transport Depot at Oatlands Park, in Surrey, pigs, poultry and rabbits were raised by disabled soldiers as therapy and sold on the open market. The effects of the 1917 U-Boat campaign, and the urgent calls by the Imperial Government for production of food, saw an extension of the hospital garden concept. In September 1917 Richardson considered sending agricultural experts to all the camps and depots to advise on the best methods for maximising crops.³⁴ The Commandant of the New Zealand Convalescent Hospital at Hornchurch reported in February 1918, that the 'work on the farm was carried out almost entirely by "blue men" (hospital patients) although it was necessary to have a few khaki men as a permanent staff'.³⁵ Hornchurch hospital had been running excursions to places of agricultural interest for the soldiers working on the farm with, reportedly, 'considerable pleasure and profit'.³⁶ The largest agricultural operation was carried out in South Devon at various camps and bases known

³⁴ Memo from Brigadier-General Richardson, 27 September 1917, War Archives file 1/3/10/42, NA.

³⁵ War Archives file 1/3/10/42, NA.

³⁶ *ibid.*

collectively as the Torquay Discharge Depot. By early 1918, three farms totalling some five hundred acres were being operated. The first formal classes given to soldiers in pursuits related to agriculture were begun in early 1917 at a branch of the No.2 New Zealand Hospital at Walton-on-Thames.³⁷ These classes were established for the rehabilitation of limbless men, and included in the curriculum were wool-classing, pig, poultry and rabbit-breeding.

By early 1918, the number of wounded and ill soldiers convalescing in U.K. hospitals and depots had risen to such an extent that the authorities were prompted to initiate a broad-ranging educational scheme. It was hoped that this would improve the opportunities of the soldiers when they returned home. But beyond the immediate vocational training was the provision of the skills and knowledge which would ensure the protection of the state by the successful reincorporation of the men.³⁸ Colonel H. Stewart, Director of Education, later reported that the citizenship component of the education course, taught through compulsory lessons in civics and economics, was 'the primary object of the scheme', and that 'it is hoped to drive home generally some measure of acquaintance with economic principles, and inculcate an attitude of sanity in a subject where extremist notions have vociferous partisans'.³⁹ The Bolshevik revolution was having an impact.

The implementation of an integrated educational programme began with a conference held in London in May 1918, which soldiers with pre-war teaching experience at all levels of education attended.⁴⁰ Courses were created in both purely educational and vocational subjects, while teachers were appointed for all hospitals and depots. Funds and equipment were to be provided by the YMCA and

³⁷ J.R. Kirk, 'The New Zealand Soldier: His Outlook', *United Empire*, 10, 1919, p.70.

³⁸ *ibid.*, pp.68-75, p.70.

³⁹ Colonel H. Stewart, 'Education in the New Zealand Forces', *The Empire Review*, 33, 1919, pp.63-69; see also Brigadier-General G.S. Richardson, 'Education in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force', p.223.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

regimental funds.⁴¹ From March 1917, the New Zealand YMCA had been helping out with classes of instruction at the New Zealand hospitals and convalescent depots, to counteract what Colonel Stewart described as 'hospital spirit.' These classes provided the basic start of the educational scheme.⁴² Under the educational scheme Torquay became the Central School of Agriculture, while classes were also established at the New Zealand base camp at *Etables* in France. There is also evidence that some officers at the front were concerning themselves with post-war problems and organising ad hoc classes for the men in their units.⁴³ Briscoe Moore, a notable farming sector leader in New Zealand after the war, recalled giving a lecture on the subject of sheep farming to an audience of 400 men of the New Zealand Mounted Rifle Brigade at Rafia camp in Palestine while they were awaiting shipping home. His lecture was part of an educational course that, he said, 'was set up in a number of subjects designed to help the troops on their re-entry into life at home. This was quite popular and served to mitigate the boredom of the men throughout several months'.⁴⁴ A British officer recalled that the authorities saw education as a means of occupying the soldiers' time prior to demobilisation, and that he had given a poorly received talk to his men but that it 'was when the boot was rather on the other foot and the men were educating their superiors'.⁴⁵

After an initial trial, the activities of the education section were progressively expanded throughout 1918 although control of the programme was not centralised

⁴¹ The American YMCA also planned and established training courses in Agriculture for US soldiers based in France. The US Army took over control of the scheme and established a college of agriculture at *Beaune*, which had 6000 students while another 2600 were at a farm school at *Allerey*. The United States had over 2 million men in its forces stationed in France and extension courses provided instruction in agriculture to almost every unit in France. Alfred C. True, *A History of Agricultural Education in the United States*, New York, 1969, pp.299-300.

⁴² Stewart, 'Education in the New Zealand Forces', p.63.

⁴³ Letter from E. Griffiths to the Minister of Lands, D. Guthrie, 6 June 1918, on behalf of his brother, Lieut. Colonel G.C. Griffiths, requesting up to date information on land settlement for the purpose of providing lectures to his men. L&S file 26/1-4, NA.

⁴⁴ Briscoe Moore, *From Forest to Farm*, London, 1969, p.32 It has also been recorded that some New Zealand mounted troops in Palestine attended four-week courses at the Jewish Agricultural College at Jaffa, Richardson, 'Education in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force', p.231.

⁴⁵ H.E.L. Mellersh, *Schoolboy into War*, London, 1978, p.184.

until November 1918, with the establishment of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force Education Department. Its primary function was to provide educational services to men awaiting repatriation, in the hope that soldiers' thoughts would be focused 'not on war but on peace, not on destruction but on production and construction'.⁴⁶ The economist J.B. Condliffe, who was an education instructor at the Hornchurch Convalescent Hospital in 1918, felt that the most important feature of the education was that it was compulsory and that it was unlikely that soldiers could be exposed to the benefits of the scheme once they had been discharged in New Zealand.⁴⁷ As to the soldiers' attitude towards the scheme, Condliffe noted:

While I have no doubt that there is a certain amount of inertia and growling (a common habit among soldiers) there is no trace of it in the class room.... I believe the fellows are genuinely interested, and while one never hopes for any revolutionary results, the stimulation of interest cannot be altogether void of effect.⁴⁸

The Army anticipated that New Zealand troops would be used for garrison duty in Germany until at least the end of 1919, and it was thought that troops would be trickled back to the United Kingdom for demobilisation. It was intended that they would pass through Torquay camp and receive advanced instruction in agriculture after having preliminary instruction in their unit depots or at the large New Zealand demobilisation camp at *Rouen* in France. The Imperial Government's decision, at the request of the Dominion authorities, to quickly repatriate Dominion soldiers, called for a change of policy in the Army Education Department. It was decided that more instruction was to be carried out at unit level, including special trips to various agricultural shows and institutions in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Some soldiers appear to have received leave without pay to travel to Holland to observe the Dutch dairy industry.⁴⁹ More talented men were given special

⁴⁶ Kirk, 'The New Zealand Soldier', p.73.

⁴⁷ A letter from Condliffe published in *The Press*, 5 October 1918, clipping on Army Department file 78 27/140, NA.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Letter from the Minister of Defence to an Opoiki farmer, 24 November 1918, Army Department file 27/140, NA; Letter from William Ferguson to Acting Prime Minister, 8 November 1918, National Efficiency Board memoranda book vol. 3, QMS, WTU.

training facilities at Torquay before taking up scholarships at the West of Scotland Agricultural Collage at Glasgow.⁵⁰

The London-based Army Education Department, concerned over the lack of teaching material relating to New Zealand agricultural conditions and methods, compiled a series of booklets on agricultural topics. These were distributed to units and placed aboard homeward bound troopships. The booklets provided very sound advice on a large range of issues relating to farming, particularly on the subject of land valuation and the dangers of speculation. It was noted that, for the young farmer, the two main essentials were experience and capital. The prospective soldier farmer was also reminded that the work ethic attributes of energy and perseverance were vital for success and that time wasted was money lost.⁵¹ The Army's concern for training in agriculture appears justified by the reported attitude of the soldiers. Lieut. Colonel E.H. Northcroft, the Director of Education for the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, observed that, 'the greater number of the men had reached a settled determination to "go on the land" when they return to New Zealand'.⁵² Richardson later reported that the greatest enthusiasm was shown by the troops for classes in agricultural science and related areas.⁵³

As part of the process to keep the men occupied on board the troopships, the education programme was continued under the direction of specially appointed instructors. The first troopships to have education classes left Britain in August 1918.⁵⁴ Attendance at classes was voluntary on the voyage of the troopship *Ayrshire* but no record remains of the effectiveness of this approach.⁵⁵ In 1918 the

⁵⁰ *The New Zealand Farmer Stock and Station Journal*, January 1920, p.125.

⁵¹ New Zealand Expeditionary Force Education Department, Agricultural notes, 1919, WTU.

⁵² *ibid.* This meshes with my contention that the soldiers may have been attracted to the rural lifestyle by their experience in the trenches, which was often the antithesis of the New Zealand rural idyll.

⁵³ Brigadier-General Richardson, 'Education in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force', p.231.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.221.

⁵⁵ Reports of the Officers-in-Charge of the education programmes on board various New Zealand bound troop ships. Army Department file 65/226, NA.

element of compulsion was introduced on the troop transports, as it had also been in camps in the United Kingdom, with the students subject to normal army discipline. Approximately three hours per day were set aside for educational classes. However, as Christopher Pugsley has shown, discipline aboard these vessels broke down almost completely, so the effectiveness of the official shipboard programmes must be questioned.⁵⁶ The courses on board troopships suffered from a lack of resources, space, and time. Despite attendance being compulsory, many of the men in key areas such as the mess did not get time to attend while many found reasons not to attend, or if they did, not to co-operate with the instructors.⁵⁷ The records of classes on board the troop transports indicate that in many subjects the level of attainment by the soldiers was not high.⁵⁸

The opportunities for training on the soldiers' return to New Zealand was dependent upon whether they remained under army discipline while recuperating from wounds and disease, or were discharged. Under Army policy, soldiers were not to be discharged until their health was of a satisfactory standard. This directed the pre-armistice training policy in New Zealand towards the provision of training facilities at the army hospitals and sanatoria where agricultural training focused on the therapeutic value of light work. Almost all of the 25,000 men who had returned home by the end of 1918 were categorised unfit, and so spent a period of time in health institutions, either in the United Kingdom or New Zealand.

In January 1918, the Army medical authorities sounded out the Department of Agriculture's willingness to have neurasthenia cases trained in farming at Ruakura state farm. The Director of Military Hospitals was of the opinion that use should be made of the state farms for cases of neurasthenia as 'there is no doubt that many cases of this sort might benefit from having to do light work and thus keep

⁵⁶ Pugsley, *On The Fringe Of Hell*, p.293; Sergeant F.J. Wooten wrote to Brodrick complaining of the lack of information relative to the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act provided to the soldiers on board a March 1919 sailing of the troop ship *Willochra*. 'Many men wanted to know why an adequate supply of these leaflets were[sic] not aboard'. L&S file. 26/1-6, NA.

⁵⁷ Army Department file 65/226, NA.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

their minds occupied'.⁵⁹ This approach was independent of the discussions taking place between the Department of Agriculture, the politicians, and the Department of Lands over the training of discharged soldiers. Although initially hesitant, the agriculture authorities consented to having four enlisted soldiers placed on Ruakura as an experiment to gauge the effectiveness of such a training programme upon their health. By June 1918 the Department was suggesting that work, and 'some' training, in various agricultural pursuits could be provided as long as transport could be arranged to bring selected soldiers to Ruakura on a day-to-day basis. Whatever the intention only one army out-patient attended Ruakura for instruction up until the end of 1918.⁶⁰

In the belief that work was a cure-all for TB and shell-shock cases, the Army established small farming operations at three of its special hospitals, Pukeora in Hawkes Bay, Hanmer in Canterbury, and Cashmere near Christchurch. Pukeora and Cashmere were sanatoria, while both TB and shell-shock (neurasthenia) cases were dealt with at Hanmer. The training farm at Hanmer was established so that, to quote the Director of Sanatoria Medical Services, 'soldiers would not be wholly without experience if they decide to go on the land after discharge'.⁶¹ Attempts to persuade the director of Ruakura state Farm to allow TB patients to attend classes were unsuccessful, however, and provoked the Army to increase its farm operations at the three sanatoria hospitals. The Repatriation Department established a training farm at Tauherenikau, in southern Wairarapa, especially for infectious tubercular soldiers and discharged soldiers, which was operated in conjunction with

⁵⁹ Memo from Director of Military Hospitals to Director-General of Medical Services, 23 May 1918, Army Department file 1/74/8, NA.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ Memo from Director of Medical Services (sanatoria), to Director, Agricultural Department, 1919, AD 49/261/14, NA. W.G. Allan, in his 1967 thesis, discusses the 'rudimentary provision for agricultural training' and then suggests that the Hanmer farm was to cater for all classes of soldier settlers but, however, the facilities were inadequate to provide for everyone', pp.39, 49.

the army hospital in Featherston.⁶² The Department of Agriculture took over the running of Tauherenikau, on behalf of the Repatriation Department, in 1919.⁶³

Attempts were made by the Army to provide agricultural instruction as part of the general educational and vocational scheme at all hospitals and camps where soldiers were housed. W.H. Montgomery, Officer-in-Charge of the Army Education and Vocational Training Section, thought highly of the agricultural training plan as, 'it is essential that as many soldiers as possible be "induced" to settle upon the land'.⁶⁴ However, the practical provision of agricultural training at general hospitals and camps was beset by problems, including a lack of qualified instructors. In June 1918 the army educational authorities reported that it was difficult 'to do anything more than toy with agricultural instruction because the instructors of the Agricultural Department and the Education Board can attend us only in their spare time'.⁶⁵ It appears that this service was provided by instructors on a voluntary basis and the army suggested that some good men should be employed for the purpose.⁶⁶ As was the case with the attempts by other government agencies to provide agricultural training courses during the war, the Army complained about the apparent apathy of the men towards the help that was being provided for them.⁶⁷ The Army ceased its operations in agricultural education as the soldier 'problem' was reduced with the passage of time.

The educational opportunities for soldiers who took their discharge directly upon arrival back in New Zealand after January 1919, were mostly provided by the newly established Repatriation Department. The Department had a number of responsibilities related to discharged soldiers and was animated by a desire to,

⁶² Army Department file 74/32, NA.

⁶³ Army Department file 74/8, NA.

⁶⁴ Montgomery to the District Superintendent, Department of Agriculture, Industries and Commerce, Auckland, 17 December 1918, Army Department file 87/103/6, NA.

⁶⁵ Army Department file 87/103/6, NA.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ Annual Report of Defence Forces of New Zealand, *AJHR*, H.19, 1919, p.39.

'return the soldier to as good, if not to a better position in civil life, than he held prior to enlisting'.⁶⁸ The Repatriation Department instituted two agricultural training schemes which appear to have drawn heavily on the earlier suggestions of the National Efficiency Board and the Board of Agriculture. State farms were still the centre-piece, although the Department of Agriculture was relieved of much of the cost of the actual tuition and the provision of accommodation.⁶⁹ The second component of the training scheme involved subsidised practical experience for individual discharged soldiers on private farms.

Despite a lack of initial enthusiasm by the Director of the state farm at Ruakura, an educational scheme for discharged soldiers who were recuperating from wounds was established in early 1919 in co-operation with the Repatriation Department. *The New Zealand Farmer* was critical of the apparent lack of encouragement and publicity for this training course at Ruakura.⁷⁰ The initial reluctance of discharged soldiers to take on training gave way to a greater demand once larger numbers of fit men began to arrive home.⁷¹ There was not a wholesale rush, but the limited facilities on the state farms were soon over-taxed.⁷² Patriotic societies were prevailed upon to provide finance for huts and furnishings at Ruakura. By the end of 1919 the Director-General of Agriculture reported to Parliament that the

⁶⁸ Memo from the Director of Repatriation to Director of Vocational Training, Defence Department, 26 August 1919, Army Department file 87/103/6, NA.

⁶⁹ It appears from the evidence that the Department of Agriculture was always a reluctant participant in the training scheme, and that the Departmental officials had consistently avoided co-operation with the Department of Lands and the Army so as to safe-guard their own resources for experimental work and the provision of civilian demonstration courses. This can be seen in the Army's complaint that instructors from the Department could only help out in their own unpaid time.

⁷⁰ *The New Zealand Farmer Stock and Station Journal*, February 1919, p.231.

⁷¹ A 1919 article in *The Round Table* had taken the Government to task over the inadequacies of the agriculture scheme because, as the writer noted, what facilities that were available were totally inadequate to deal with soldiers who wished to change vocations. March, 1919, p.644.

⁷² Extra accommodation at Ruakura was provided by army Bell tents. The fit men who went to Weraroa in Levin at least had the advantage of the wooden, albeit spartan, huts that had been used by conscientious objectors who had been accommodated on the farm. Memo from Reakes, Director-General of Agriculture to the Minister of Agriculture, 27 February 1919, Agriculture Department file 59/6-14, 2736, NA.

existing accommodation for 30 soldiers was insufficient to meet demand.⁷³ The men were given four-month courses in lighter agricultural work to determine their capabilities as farmers. An extension of time was available to enthusiastic trainees. However, those showing little interest or aptitude could be removed from the course at the end of four months.⁷⁴ Six returned nurses also received training in the apiary section.⁷⁵

In a submission to the Director-General of Agriculture J.L. Bruce, the Acting Superintendent of Experimental Farms, indicated the sense of unease with which the Department of Agriculture was approaching the whole question of soldier education. The discharged soldiers were to be under military-style discipline, and were expected to perform without question such duties as were allotted to them while being under the absolute control of the manager of the farm. For its part the Department was:

to give of its best to secure for the men such knowledge of practical farming operations as is possible in the time allotted, yet realising that a smattering only can be gained in six or even twenty-six months; a comprehensive knowledge entailing a long course.⁷⁶

In a telling observation, and one which was at the heart of the whole proposed agricultural training scheme, the Director-General of Agriculture wrote that 'agricultural instruction must be clearly differentiated from farm training which the un-versed soldier wants - opportunities to handle teams, to learn all kinds of cultivation work, sowing and harvesting etc'.⁷⁷ Apart from the work on state farms, the Department of Agriculture also co-operated with the Repatriation Department in the establishment of four training farms, two in the North Island and

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Memo from the Manager of Ruakura to the Director-General of Agriculture, 25 July 1919, Agriculture Department file 19/17/34, 2736, NA.

⁷⁵ Report of the Board of Agriculture, *AJHR*, H.29, 1920, p.29. Two nurses also received some practical experience at the government Horticultural Station in Tauranga.

⁷⁶ Memo from Bruce to the Director-General of Agriculture, 17 July 1919, Agriculture Department file 19/17/10, 2736, NA.

⁷⁷ Army Department file 87/103/6, NA.

two in the South, while also being involved in a patriotic society initiative in the Wairarapa.

The two South Island farms were not traditional pastoral or dairy farms. Avonhead, near Christchurch, was a mixed venture with a combination of poultry rearing, fruit trees, berries and vegetables.⁷⁸ The Moa seed farm, near Dumbarton in the Clutha valley, specialised in the production of quality seeds.⁷⁹ The farm was not a success with few soldiers willing to make seed-raising their profession. The normal four-month period of training for the soldiers was sometimes increased to twelve, but by 1921 the farm's future was in doubt.⁸⁰ The demand for training in agriculture had slackened with the advent of the short post-war depression in 1921. The Minister of Agriculture requested that the Board of Agriculture, in conjunction with a general survey of the value and cost-effectiveness of the state farms to the Dominion, investigate the viability of Avonhead and Moa seed farm.⁸¹ The Board recommended that Avonhead, which was Crown Land administered by the Department of Lands and Survey, be cut up into small poultry units, and that discharged soldiers be given preference at the ballot. Much against the advice of the Repatriation Department the Moa seed farm was to be closed.⁸²

The Repatriation Department's two North Island farms varied somewhat in approach. Tauherenikau had been established to provide agricultural training for those TB men who had been denied access to Ruakura. In the Auckland region Motuihi Island had been chosen over other areas because of the existing facilities which had been used to house German internees. This decision finally laid to rest any idea of using colony-type settlements for training. J.L. Bruce had viewed a

⁷⁸ Report of the Board of Agriculture, *AJHR*, H-29, 1920, p.27.

⁷⁹ The establishment of the farm was justified in terms of national efficiency as the country imported seeds to the value of £300,000 per year. Annual Report of the Repatriation Department, *AJHR*, H.30, 1920, p.5.

⁸⁰ A.H.H. Webster, *Teviot Tapestry: A History of the Roxburgh-Millers Flat District*, Dunedin, 1948, p.154.

⁸¹ Report of the Board of Agriculture, *AJHR*, H.29a, 1920, p.2.

⁸² *Farmers' Union Advocate*, 27 January 1923, p.13.

property at Paremoremo which the Auckland Patriotic Society had recommended for purchase as a colony scheme. He considered that it would take two years to break in the property which, in his view, ran counter to the object of the Repatriation Department which 'is to have these men given a short course of practical training on an established and fairly well equipped farm'.⁸³ As it was, Motuihi was not particularly successful in terms of numbers, with only seven men training in July 1920, and four by September.

The final category of specific training farms were those funded by patriotic societies. There were in fact only two, one of which was never used for its intended purpose. The Homebrook estate, consisting of 1130 acres near Southbridge in Canterbury, had been purchased by the Lands and Survey Department in 1917 and turned over to the Canterbury Patriotic Society as a soldiers' training farm.⁸⁴ Brodrick reported to his Minister on 6 July 1918 that no soldiers had sought training and that the Department of Lands had resumed control of the property which was to be subdivided and leased under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act.⁸⁵

The second patriotic farm, named Penrose, was located in the Wairarapa. At first glance it appeared the ideal combination of community concern for the soldiers' future, and narrower government concern to return the soldiers to civilian life as quickly and efficiently as possible. The farm was described as a gift to the soldiers but in reality the Wairarapa Patriotic Society paid some £12,000 for three properties which totalled 730 acres. Various organisations had a hand in the establishment of the training farm. On the Board of Agriculture's recommendation a conference was held with the Council of Education, the National Efficiency Board, and representatives of the donors to formulate a scheme.⁸⁶

⁸³ Agriculture Department file 59/6-14, 2736, NA.

⁸⁴ Massey told the house that the estate was to be 'a sort of training farm for returned soldiers', *NZPD*, 15 April 1918, p.259.

⁸⁵ L&S file 26/1-3, NA.

⁸⁶ Wild, *The Life and Times of Sir James Wilson*, p.165.

The agreement was for the donors to provide the land and stock while the Government would provide buildings and meet running costs. Management was placed in the hands of a board of trustees representing the Wairarapa A & P Association and the Government, with day-to-day administration in the hands of a 'capable, practical man'.⁸⁷ The emphasis was to be placed on practical training. C.J. Reakes informed the Minister of Agriculture that the methods to be followed on this farm would be more suitable for returned soldiers than the more technical farming on the state farms.⁸⁸ The scheme was approved by Cabinet in November 1918

as a demonstration farm to provide in a practical and efficient manner an object lesson to learners and farmers in sound practical modern profit earning farming practice. Nothing to be done in either the shape of erection of farm buildings or farming methods which is not within the capacity, financially, of the ordinary farmer: as a place for accommodating returned soldiers desirous of learning good farming methods and giving them all facilities for doing so: training youths in modern farming methods: for furthering the advancements of practical farming methods, generally, thereby assisting to stimulate increased production.⁸⁹

Note the contradictions in this 'mission statement' between the work ethic basis of the ideal pioneer farming methods, as expressed in 'practical', and the discussion of 'modern' and 'efficient' profitability. The farm began training operations in June 1918, and, as with other avenues for training, the soldiers were initially reluctant to take advantage of the offered facility. By late 1919, Reakes was able to report to the Minister of Internal Affairs that, 'the position is quite altered... and the number of soldiers offering is actually in excess of the accommodation at the moment available.'⁹⁰

⁸⁷ *Soldiers Guide*, Wellington, 1919, p.44.

⁸⁸ Agriculture Department file 59/6-4, 2736, NA.

⁸⁹ Director-General of Agriculture to Minister of Agriculture, 10 October, 1918, Agriculture Department series 4, file BDL, 1924/b, NA.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

The Government contributed £9000 as the running costs and the cost of buildings for the first eighteen months of operations, and in September 1920, another £2000 was approved by Cabinet. By July 1921, demand from soldiers for farm training had ended and Reakes reported:

53 ex-soldiers passed through the training farm in a course of instruction in general farming and dairy farming, the practical instruction given being supplemented by lectures and demonstrations by expert officers of the department and by settlers in the district who have been good enough to pass on their special knowledge.⁹¹

These apparently good results achieved on the farm did not find favour with all the participants. Members of the Wairarapa Patriotic Society considered the farm a failure because so few men had been trained for the large outlay, and because the four-month training course was insufficient to teach novices how to farm. The Society also claimed that most of the trainees turned to other vocations after finishing the course.⁹² Mr C. Reid, a member of the training farm committee claimed that 'the farm was practically a failure so far as making farmers was concerned'.⁹³ However, the scheme was strongly defended by W. Parry, chairman of the farm trustees, who claimed that there had sometimes been over a hundred men receiving instruction on the farm, some for periods up to twelve months. He maintained that the majority were very keen to get on to the land but, in a telling indictment of the whole training scheme, he observed:

I would not say that these men were capable of managing a farm, but they were shown by experts how the work should be done. They were under expert supervision and proved themselves apt pupils. Who could say that these returned soldiers have not had as good value for their money as most others.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Memo from Director-General of Agriculture to the Minister of Agriculture, 22 July 1921, Agriculture Department series 4, file BDL 1924/B, NA.

⁹² *Wairarapa Age*, 22 May 1922, clipping on Agriculture Department series 4, file BDL, 1924/B, NA.

⁹³ *ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Wairarapa Age*, 23 May 1922, clipping on Agriculture Department series 4, file BDL 1924/B, NA.

The last category of 'others' are the approximately 250 men who officially received some type of practical training with private farmers. The Repatriation Department operated a subsidized wage scheme so that trainees were assured of an income of £2 per week, plus keep, outside of any pension allowance.⁹⁵ By 20 August 1921 only 34 soldiers remained in subsidized farm training work.⁹⁶ The reduction was due to the impact of the post-war depression on the rural economy. By late 1921 the training of returned soldiers on state farms, with the exception of Ruakura, had practically ceased.⁹⁷ The lack of demand by returned soldiers for training services was interpreted as the end of the need for repatriation assistance, although training remained as a policy of the Repatriation Department until September 1922, when financial support was withdrawn with the abolition of the Department.

In terms of the original intent to provide training for inexperienced discharged soldiers the schemes were unsuccessful. It is apparent that the soldiers' enthusiasm for undertaking training waxed and waned in relation to the state of the rural economy and their individual state of health. But both the Government's preparation for, and understanding of, what was required by the soldiers was also lacking. Two contradictory forces were in operation, yet the paradox is that the description for both was efficiency. The training of soldiers in agriculture to be the shock troops in a campaign to more closely settle the abundant land of New Zealand was justified by the need for increased production to improve the nation's income, but at the same time economic efficiency was the justification for providing only a short course of instruction. This was succinctly articulated by J.L. Bruce, in November 1919:

⁹⁵ Annual Report of the Repatriation Department, *AJHR*, H.30, 1919, p.6. In 1920 complaints about variations in the quality of food given by some of the employing farmers led the Department of Agriculture to make enquiries to the army for a scale of rations similar to that provided to soldiers in camp. The men were to receive standard rations, with suitable modification to suit local conditions.

⁹⁶ Annual Report of the Repatriation Department, *AJHR*, H.30, 1921, p.4.

⁹⁷ Memo from C.J. Reakes, Director-General of Agriculture to the Director of Education, Agriculture Department file 59/6-14, 2736, NA.

The real object of the [agriculture] department is to get these men through as quickly as possible so that they may have an opportunity if[sic] either obtaining employment with private owners to further improving their knowledge, or of going out on their account, and, further no doubt, the Repatriation Department is desirous of reducing this enormous expenditure as soon as possible.⁹⁸

The soldiers themselves were not enthusiastic about the training scheme. In early 1916 it was reported in the press that no returned soldiers had requested agricultural training at the 'experimental farms'.⁹⁹ This early lack of enthusiasm coloured official reaction to the provision of training in the period up to the armistice. Brodrick noted in the Department of Lands' 1918 Annual Report that 'the discharged soldiers at present have shown no inclination to submit to training before taking up land... the offer by the Department of Agriculture to train men on their agricultural farms met with little or no response'.¹⁰⁰

Several factors may have inhibited the soldiers in this period. Firstly, most of the early returned soldiers were either wounded or sick and may not have felt in a position to make a decision about their long-term future. Their hesitancy may have also related to the effect that the training option may have had on their long-term prospects for pensions, while training, being offered in only three locations, involved further absence from family and kin. The very nature of the land boom, which was being driven largely by the artificial inflation of the commandeered scheme, may have lured prospective soldier settlers on to the land market to beat rising prices, rather than 'waste' time in training. Prior to the armistice the settlement scheme was operating at a relatively slow pace because of the shortage of suitable land and the necessary administrative difficulties of subdividing repurchased settlement land. There was no guarantee that a short training course would ensure acquisition of a soldier settlement farm. The RSA claimed that fear of missing out on the largesse of the settlement scheme had scared soldiers away

⁹⁸ Agriculture Department file 59/6-14, 2736, NA.

⁹⁹ *Evening Post*, 19 February 1916, clipping on L&S file 26/1-4, NA.

¹⁰⁰ Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1918, p.3.

from the time consuming training schemes, and it wanted a pledge from the Government that a twelve-month warning would be given before the benefits under the repatriation scheme were halted.¹⁰¹

The fundamental reason for soldiers' apparent objection to taking up training options may relate to their experiences in the army. On discharge, few would have been willing to subject themselves to institutionalised training and control such as that offered on the state farms, and particularly under the draconian discipline suggested by the Department of Agriculture. The reality for many of the soldiers was that the war experience, and the trauma of combat, had temporarily left them with little initiative, and they required time before being able to make life direction decisions. The value of army training courses was also affected by the soldiers' attitude and respect for the instructors. Soldiers had only scorn for those, in or out of uniform, whom they thought were shirkers. During wartime, instructors fitted neatly into this category as compared with front-line troops, while 'book learning' did not fit well with the image of the tough antipodean soldier. Some of the soldiers resented the paternalistic attitude that the education authorities exhibited.¹⁰² The very nature of the immediate post-war economy did not encourage those with a serious bent for the land to indulge in time-wasting study.

Even at the time, the value of the training scheme in agriculture was questioned by those authorities intimately involved with its administration. There was adequate advice from recognised bodies such as the Board of Agriculture and the National Efficiency Board that a two-year course was the minimum effective learning period, yet the length of training was set at four months. The agricultural authorities seem to have reacted without enthusiasm to the extra burden placed upon them by government policy. This lack of enthusiasm translated into a short introductory course to weed out the weak students. It may be that access to the

¹⁰¹ Letter to the Minister of Lands from the Secretary General of the RSA, 12 January 1920, L&S file 26/1-6, NA. Guthrie's reply was non-committal and he claimed it was a matter for Parliament yet, within months, parts of the land settlement scheme were being suspended.

¹⁰² Boyack, *Behind the Lines*, p.202.

land, or in this case a basic knowledge of the principles of farming, was seen as having different values, depending upon individual views of involvement. The Army could perceive agricultural training as contributing to discipline, and to recuperation. Vocational training could be seen as a concrete attempt at re-civilising the returned soldiers and bringing them back into society. The question of the value of the training in terms of improving soldiers' employment prospects, as opposed to its recuperative value, was one about which the Army seemed to be ambivalent. Following an administrative decision to provide a record of the soldiers' educational attainments, the Director of Army Base Records noted:

In my opinion, although the entries re education etc will be most useful for statistical purposes and proof of the government's consideration for our soldiers future welfare, the actual value in assisting soldiers to obtain employment will be practically nil....The fact that a soldier has taken a few hours course in numerous subjects is unlikely to assist him in obtaining employment.¹⁰³

Ambivalence summed up the attitude of all parties involved in the training of soldiers for post-war vocations and this was clearly seen in the farm training schemes which in no way matched the effort of the Government to provide land for discharged soldier settlers.

¹⁰³ Internal memo, Army Base Records, 25 November 1918, Army Department file 27/140, NA.

CHAPTER 4

PRELUDE TO SETTLEMENT

Land administration as a wartime issue began to concern Prime Minister Massey early in 1915. Several matters emerged which required the relationship between the soldiers and the State to be addressed. First, the main-body of the Army contained a number of existing Crown farm tenants who, by volunteering, were unable to comply with the conditions of their leases in regard to residence and improvements. Massey instructed the Land Boards to treat these men in a most liberal manner and no cases of forfeiture were to proceed except on his instructions as Minister of Lands. Any soldier wishing to transfer his section in anticipation of war service was to be given the utmost consideration. Second, the position of a soldier at the front who wished to be included in a ballot for Crown Land had to be determined. Massey's initial response was to allow relatives or friends to apply on the soldiers' behalf. This was subsequently modified to allow preference for soldiers' applications *vis-à-vis* those of civilians. Concern for soldier Crown tenants was also codified in the 1915 Land Laws Amendment Act which allowed wartime privileges in relation to land administration to be extended for up to six months after discharge. The third concern was the provision of land for the returning soldier.

In May 1915 Massey stated that he intended to reserve what little good Crown Land remained for the settlement of returned soldiers.¹ It might be suggested that the landing at Gallipoli in April 1915, and the ongoing controversy over voluntarism was motivating Massey. Sir James Allen, the Minister of Defence, had suggested to Massey that land in fruit-growing areas should be set aside for future soldier settlement, 'as the fruit industry might be particularly suitable for returned

¹ *Dominion*, 19 May 1915, p.8.

troopers'.² The fruit industry as the basis of a repatriation programme came to dominate the official discourse through to the passing of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act in October 1915, and on into early 1916. Allen was still advocating the establishment of a special fruit-growing colony settlement for soldiers in 1917.³

In consideration of Allen's suggestion Massey had James McKenzie, the Undersecretary for Lands, provide schedules of exiting Crown Land which might prove suitable for soldier settlement - with particular reference to fruit growing areas.⁴ The results of these enquiries had come to hand by the time Massey introduced the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Bill, drafted by Sir Francis Bell, into the House in September 1915. However it is not clear that Massey or Bell were conversant with the report's findings.⁵ Massey, with an eye to post-war civilian settlement, was also concerned that the demands of soldier settlement might eat into the available Crown reserves to the detriment of future settlement.⁶

The proposed policy of the Department for providing soldiers with land was outlined by McKenzie in a memorandum to the Commissioners of Crown Lands in September 1915.⁷ The proposals had been arrived at with the co-operation of W.B. Hudson, Secretary of the Government Insurance Department and acting head of the recently established Discharged Soldiers' Information Department. He had

² Memo from Allen to Massey, 20 May 1915, L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

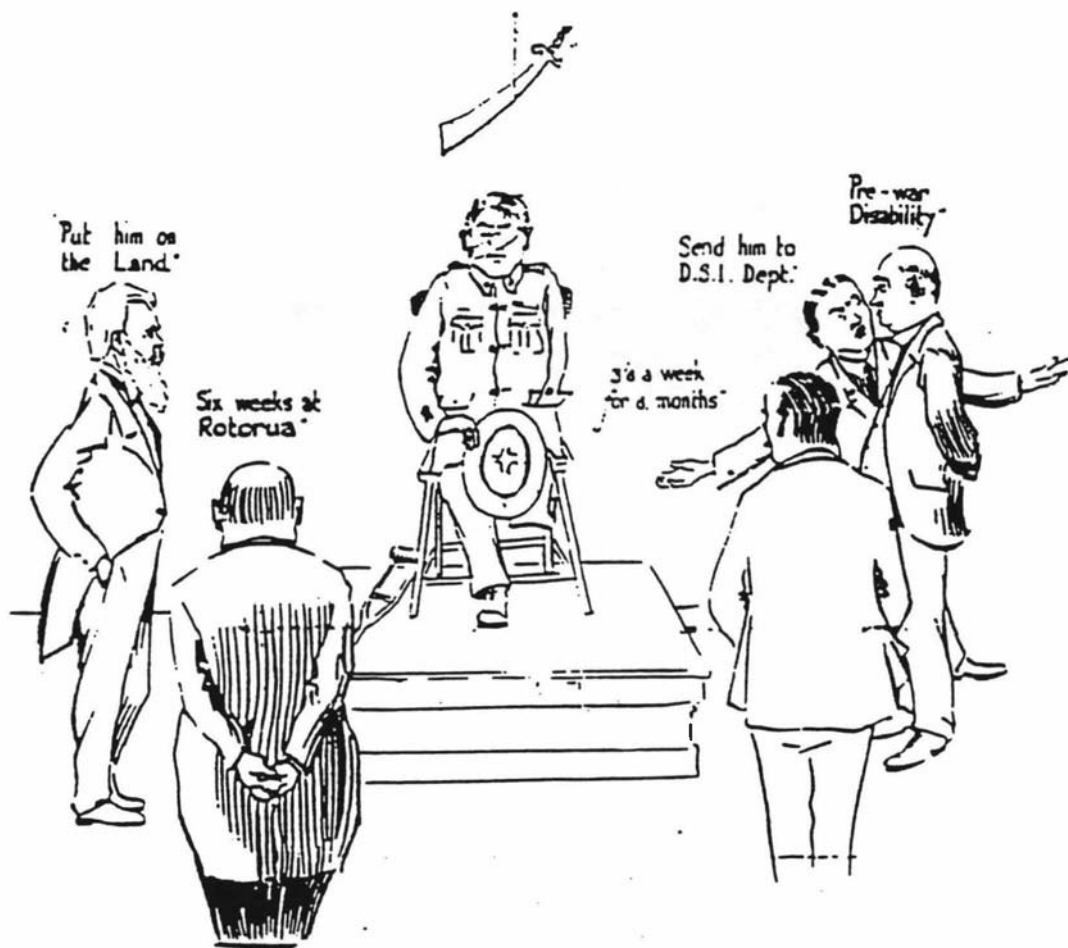
³ *Auckland Weekly News*, 31 May 1917, p.16.

⁴ Department of Lands and Survey Circular, 4 June 1915, L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

⁵ McKenzie was replaced by T.N. Brodrick in October 1915. On taking over McKenzie's office, Brodrick found a number of the Commissioners' land evaluation reports in a desk. From Brodrick's diary entries, it appears these had not made their way to the Minister.

⁶ Memo from McKenzie to A.L. Herdman, Minister-in-Charge of the Discharged Soldiers' Information Department, 10 September 1915, L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

⁷ Department of Lands and Survey briefing paper, September 1915, L&S file 26/1-1, NA.



MERELY A LIBEL.

The artist, G.A.P., is not depicting an actual scene at a sitting of the Pensions Board, which is reported to be a benign body, at present. His purpose is to issue a solemn warning against any lapse into Bumbledom by any Board in the future. He asks the forgiveness of the present members, whom he loves.

Source. *Quick March*, February 1919.

The soldiers' early view of their position as victims of an incompetent government. Various members of the Government represent the lack of an integrated repatriation policy. The figure on the left is David Guthrie, Minister of Lands.

liaised with McKenzie personally, as there was still doubt as to which of the two organisations was to have control of the scheme. Hudson envisaged that the Discharged Soldiers' Information Department would be the controlling body and would call on the expert services of the Department of Lands in much the same way as Departments, such as Health and Education, were approached on matters related to soldiers. A.L. Herdman, the Minister-in-Charge of the Soldiers' Information Department was inclined to let the Department of Lands deal with the matter of land settlement, although he suggested that the Board of Agriculture might be able to provide 'valuable practical suggestions'.⁸

McKenzie was contemplating a policy based on existing legislation and established settlement methods. He envisaged that healthy soldiers returning after the war would have access to only little more than was currently available; the sick and wounded were to be the primary beneficiaries of the intended land settlement scheme. It was thought by McKenzie that this latter group would require small settlements and he suggested that the land between Wellington and the Manawatu along the North Island's west coast would be suitable for the purpose. He also expected that there would be less than 2,000 applicants for Crown assistance because of an early conclusion to the war.⁹ It was considered within the Department of Lands that a proposed ten year restriction on the resale of interest in soldier farms would deter all but the most enthusiastic applicants:

It must be quite understood that the men desiring to go in for land must prove themselves in every respect suitable and willing to establish themselves in a *bona fide* manner, making it quite evident that speculation is not their main object.¹⁰

The Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Bill contained 12 clauses covering matters of definition of returned soldiers, tenures available, the setting apart of Crown Land or the acquisition of private land, authority to make regulations, the raising of funds,

⁸ Memo from A.L. Herdman to Massey, 2 September 1915, L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

⁹ L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

¹⁰ Department of Lands briefing paper, September 1915, L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

and other administrative matters. The most significant clauses, and ones which came to have prominence in later years, related to the provision of financial assistance to the soldier settler for development purposes, the option for Land Boards to remit rent, the restriction of a 10 year moratorium on transfer of a soldier's farm, and the provision for revaluation of properties, should this become necessary. The debate on the Bill was essentially laudatory of the Government's initiative, with a universal recognition of the need to reward New Zealand soldiers. Some concern was expressed over the amount of money that was to be allocated to the scheme, but Massey assured the members that the £50,000 was just an initial amount to provide development finance to the soldier settlers. The cost of the land was to be met from the land-settlement fund.¹¹ Massey made contradictory statements on this issue. By January 1916 he was still talking in terms of the land being provided out of the Crown reserves, although he was willing to consider the purchase of improved privately owned land should the Crown Land be insufficient.¹² Acknowledging that the soldiers would possess little capital, the Act allowed for the provision of advances for stocking and improvements. Experience with the Improved-Farm Settlements, established in 1894, suggested to the Department that advancing on bills of sale for stock was a satisfactory method of establishing a settler.¹³

The most severe criticism of the 1915 Bill revolved around the issue of previous experience. One member of the House observed that only some 20 per cent of the soldiers who had previous rural experience would benefit from the provisions of the Act, as it was incumbent upon the Land Boards to determine an applicant's previous experience before admitting him to a ballot.¹⁴ The issue of the soldier's

¹¹ *NZPD*, 24 September 1915, p.225.

¹² *Dominion*, 12 January 1916, clipping on L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

¹³ Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1917, p.6. The 1894 Act allowed for the development of settlement land prior to selection. The 1917 report observed that in 1912 funds were advanced to settlers for purchase of stock with security provided by bills of sale over the stock, and of the £10,000 advanced for this purpose, approximately £8000 had been re-paid by 1917.

¹⁴ J. McCombs, Social Democrat Member for Lyttelton, *NZPD*, 24 September 1915, p.226.

previous experience was to permeate the discussion throughout the settlement period and become a central component of the later historiographical criticism. In August 1917 Massey told the House that the soldier settlers must be experienced men.¹⁵ The general policy of the Department of Lands in the period up to 1919 followed Massey's directive, although it will be shown that there was a degree of regional variation in the latitude shown by the various Land Boards. Sir James Allen had informed the 1917 RSA conference in Dunedin that: 'In cases where the question of fitness arose the Land Boards proceeded in methods dictated by fairness and commonsense and not in hard and fast lines prescribed by head office'.¹⁶ During the rush on the land in the years 1919 and 1920 concern on the part of the authorities that soldier applicants should have had previous farming experience declined due to stronger political imperatives.

The land settlement initiative that emerged from the passing of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act thus remained narrow in scope. At this stage Massey clearly saw the scheme as a limited exercise, 'an experiment', aimed at helping wounded soldiers back into the mainstream of life. He supported McKenzie's contention that able-bodied troops returning after the peace would be catered for by the existing provisions of the Land Act and the Land for Settlements Act.¹⁷

A general change in attitude towards the scheme on the part of the Department and politicians is discernible in 1916, and appears tied to the increasing problem of providing reinforcements for the expeditionary force, and the subsequent introduction of conscription. At this time Massey was concerned with the unemployment problem that was likely to occur after the war, a concern heightened by the prospect of the conflict continuing into another year and requiring an ever larger number of troops. The land scheme was seen as a solution to this problem and the *Auckland Weekly News* proposed that a well-planned scheme would absorb

¹⁵ *NZPD*, 22 August 1922, p.525.

¹⁶ *Auckland Weekly News*, 31 May 1917, p.16.

¹⁷ *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 May 1916, p.17.

an indefinite number of men while at the same time opening up the 'great unoccupied regions'. The spin-off would be an easing of the financial legacy of the cost of war and the supporting of a greater population.¹⁸ The *Weekly* was at this point conceding that the military settlement was a matter for experiment.¹⁹ Massey revealed this expansion of the scheme when, during the debate of the 1916 Amendment Bill, he told the House: 'the principle upon which both the Act and the Bill are based is this: that it is the duty of the State to do everything it possibly can to provide lands for... our soldiers... and assist them to get on to that land in any way we can'.²⁰ At the same time Massey informed the Manawatu Patriotic Society that, while he agreed with its suggestion that most returned men would find their vocations in or near towns, 'the fact cannot be overlooked that at the conclusion of the war a large number of men will return to the Dominion physically fit for the work of bringing into profit lands situated in remote and more or less unsettled districts'.²¹

Rather than introduce a fully thought-out and operational scheme, Massey anticipated that the settlement scheme should evolve over time in tandem with the increasing demand of the returning soldiers, and that settlement of an estimated 5,000 soldiers would take at least five years from 1916.²² This perception of the scheme is also reflected in the activities of the Department of Lands, and in the subsequent amendments to the original Act.

Historians have suggested that the progressive introduction of legislation between 1915 and 1924 shows a lack of preparedness and forward-planning on the Government's part. However, the apparatus of centralised State administration was not developed sufficiently, nor were resources available, to allow for the degree of forward-planning required to introduce a sophisticated and fully thought-out

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.51.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.17.

²⁰ *NZPD*, 14 June 1916, p.841.

²¹ Letter from Massey to the Secretary, Manawatu Patriotic Society, 31 July 1916, L&S file 26/1-2, NA.

²² *NZPD*, 14 June 1916, p.845.

settlement scheme. The call from interest groups was in fact for decentralised administration of the scheme, below even the level of the district Land Boards, so that 'practical' individuals would operate the scheme. Opposition to red-tape in administration of the scheme was the guiding axiom of advice received from many interest groups.²³

The activities of the Department of Lands in the period between the passing of the Act in October 1915 and the end of the financial year in March 1916 were described in the Annual Report of the Department of Lands and Survey by T.N. Brodrick, the recently appointed Undersecretary.²⁴ Brodrick expressed the Government's concern to do all that it could for the men who had risked their lives for the country. He suggested that there would be a great demand for land at the end of the war both from men with rural backgrounds, and from urban men who were now 'enamoured with the open-air life that a military campaign entails.'²⁵ The scheme would not only meet the demands of the soldiers, but would also work to the advantage of the State in settling people out of the towns. Brodrick anticipated that the legislation would require modification over time, 'so as to comprehensively deal with the varied classes of soldiers... and all bodies of men entitled to recognition by the people of this Dominion'.²⁶ Although Brodrick was expressing these sentiments in early 1916, by the end of the year his attitude had hardened somewhat because of the demands of various pressure groups and he observed: 'The object of setting it [land] aside for soldiers is to enable them to make a living out of it and not to provide a bounty for those who have served'.²⁷

²³ The establishment of the Repatriation Department in late 1918 also reflected a concern by the Government to be seen as not entrusting the future of soldiers welfare to public servants. The Department was run by a board of four Ministers while the staff were not considered to be public servants. Henderson, *The Quest for Efficiency*, p.94, noted: 'The implication that ex-servicemen's rehabilitation was too important to be left to the public service was clear'. It has also been suggested that the administrative framework established by the Repatriation Act was the result of political jealousy within the Coalition Government. Burdon, *The New Dominion*, p.18.

²⁴ Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1916, p.1.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Memo by Brodrick, 13 November 1916, L&S file 26/1-2.

Although only two allotments had been made under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act up to March 1916, some 272 applications had been received. The number of returned soldiers in the country by May 1916 was almost 2000; most of whom were ill or recovering from wounds. This fact seemed to have escaped the journalists from the Liberal-leaning *Lyttleton Daily Times* newspaper who attacked Massey in March 1916 for suggesting that discharged soldiers had shown little inclination to go on the land: 'It is idle and preposterous to suggest that the returned soldiers do not want to go on the land.... The soldiers were assured that farms would be waiting for them when they returned from the front'.²⁸ As was the case with the training initiative, the soldiers took time to decide on their future vocation. Nor did the newspaper allow that some soldiers had been successful in the course of the normal ballot system for Crown Land.

The 1916 Report on the settlement scheme also laid to rest the prevalent notion of settling soldiers in fruit-growing areas.²⁹ Brodrick paraphrased the advice he had received from horticultural and orcharding specialists, which indicated that, because of the lag time between planting and taking the first crop, the fruit industry required experience and capital. A further report from the Department of Agriculture in May 1916 made the salient point that 'few of the soldiers would have even a rudimentary knowledge of commercial fruit culture' and that the likely state of health of those returning early would preclude them from the hard physical work required in an orchard.³⁰ From this point on the settlement of soldiers on orchards was relegated to specific areas around the larger centres, and in the obviously climatically favourable areas such as Hawkes Bay and Nelson. Interestingly, the Board of Agriculture suggested to the Prime Minister as late as July 1916 that incapacitated soldiers should be settled in fruit growing and light

²⁸ *Lyttleton Daily Times*, 18 March 1916, clipping on L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

²⁹ On 12 February 1916, the Cabinet had instructed Brodrick to obtain orcharding land suitable for settlement by soldiers. Following this, a conference was held between Brodrick and the Secretary of Agriculture on 3 March 1916, at which it was decided that the Lands Department would ascertain what blocks were available, while the Department of Agriculture officers would report on the suitability or otherwise of the block.

³⁰ Memo from T.W. Kirk, Director of the Horticultural Division, Department of Agriculture, Industries and Commerce, to the Secretary of Agriculture, 4 May 1916, L&S file 26/1-2, NA.

agricultural colonies. In response to this suggestion Brodrick wrote a terse minute noting that the soldiers did not appear to want fruit farms nor did they wish to take up employment in the preparation of Crown blocks for ballot.³¹

As a response to public pressure which developed from the return of wounded soldiers after mid-1915 the Department of Lands outlined a plan for the settlement of soldiers on especially improved land so that those recuperating might immediately make a living from it. 'Colony' type settlements were also thought to provide both an on-the-job training component as well as providing income for the soldiers in the period prior to their taking up sections. This meshed with the long-term belief that the Government would have to provide 'artificial' employment in such things as public works 'until the natural gateways into civilian work opened for the soldiers'.³² Although the communal-type farming projects continued to capture the imagination of many interest groups, and some returned soldiers, as a policy they never progressed beyond the discussion stage.³³ Notwithstanding this, as late as November 1917 Massey was still anticipating that soldiers would be employed on the improvement of suitable blocks of land. An alternative source of labour were the 'slavs', or Dalmatians, and consideration was given to using them to prepare land for subsequent settlement by soldiers. In light of public debate over the threat posed by these 'enemy aliens', their use on such a patriotic venture as preparing the ground for the returning heroes appears a calculated ploy by Massey.³⁴

³¹ Letter from James Wilson, President of the Board of Agriculture, to Massey, 27 July 1916, L&S file 26/1-2, NA. Brodrick's reaction to the suggestions may, in part, be explained by a confidential report by Wilson to the Dominion Council of Agriculture in June 1916, in which he noted, 'the board has felt all along that the head of department (agriculture) was antagonistic to it but that was the same with the heads of the other departments, Education and Lands, with which the Board was associated'. See Wild, *The Life and Times of Sir James Wilson*, p.157.

³² *Discharged Soldiers' Information Department: After the War*, Statement by A.L. Herdman, Attorney General and Minister-in-Charge of the Discharged Soldiers' Information Department, 28 May 1917, WTU.

³³ Memo from Brodrick to all Commissioners of Crown Lands, 16 March 1916, L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

³⁴ Paul Baker, *King and Country Call: New Zealanders, Conscription and the Great War*, Auckland, 1988, pp.222-223.

In December 1916 in response to the suggested establishment of a large co-operative fruit orchard at Te Kauwhata, Brodrick informed Sir Francis Bell, the acting Prime Minister:

It may not be out of place here to remind you that many suggestions for the establishment of co-operative farms, and farms worked on similar systems... have been received by the government from local bodies, patriotic societies and individuals during the last eighteen months, but so far none of the experiments have been approved.³⁵

In late 1916 a former officer of the Agriculture Department of Tasmania received publicity for a plan for group settlement. The intention was for the soldiers to have first option on sections they themselves had improved under the direction of reputable 'experts'. Both the Commissioner of Crown lands for Auckland and the Undersecretary dismissed the idea, suggesting that the soldiers would never be able to co-operate. Brodrick based this on his 'long experience' of the work patterns of co-operative workmen.³⁶ In a letter to the *Auckland Weekly News*, a correspondent cogently identified the advantages of group settlement for soldiers who would be without capital or previous experience on their return to New Zealand.³⁷ In January 1917 the Auckland Provincial Farmers' Union took up the plan as outlined by the *Weekly's* correspondent and, despite the objections of the Waikato sub-provincial President that the proposals were too 'utopian', forwarded the scheme to Massey for consideration. The Minister chose to ignore it, along with similar recommendations received over the period. The *Auckland Weekly News* suggested that this because the Department's horizon was limited by settlement ideas prevalent under normal conditions, namely 'Land for Settlements' methods. The implication was that the settlement of soldiers should be directed to the untold millions of acres of unimproved land through a revolutionary scheme.³⁸ The paper's comments reflected a widely held belief that there remained vast untapped

³⁵ Memo from Brodrick to Sir Francis Bell, 15 December 1916, L&S file 26/1-3, NA.

³⁶ Minute on a memo from H.M. Skeet, Commissioner of Crown Lands, Auckland, to Brodrick and the Minister of Lands, 11 November 1916, L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

³⁷ Letter from E. Earle, *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 January 1917, p.57.

³⁸ *Auckland Weekly News*, editorial, 18 January 1917, p.47.

lands available for settlement; in fact much of this land was either marginal country, or was owed by Maori.

The concern of many interested parties that the soldiers should be adequately rewarded, irrespective of their financial position, introduced a debate that was to remain at the heart of the soldier settlement story through to the present day. The Commissioner of Crown Lands for Wellington, C.M. McClure, was reported to have claimed that he did not think that the Government had opened the door wide enough to soldiers who wished to get on the land:

In my opinion every discharged soldier ought to be very liberally treated. Every fighter desirous of land should be given a section, to the exclusion of the man who can fight but stays at home.³⁹

The Wellington Land Board decided in February 1916 that the crucial factor in accessing an applicant was not the amount of capital possessed, but rather, the status of the applicant's military service.⁴⁰ The Minister of Agriculture informed Massey in June 1916 that incapacitated men with no capital should be able to get small farm blocks.⁴¹

The 1915 Act allowed for advances of up to £500 for improvements and the purchase of stock to soldiers who were assisted under that particular act. The 1916 Amendment Act extended this provision to any discharged soldier who held any Crown Land that was administered by a Land Board. Criticism from the RSA, Farmers' Union, and patriotic societies regarding the inadequacy of this amount resulted in the advance being increased in 1917 to £750, through a £250

³⁹ *Auckland Star*, 1 February 1916, report of comments made by McClure at the monthly meeting of the Wellington Land Board, clipping on L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

⁴⁰ Report of the monthly meeting of the Wellington Land Board, *Evening Post*, 13 February 1916, clipping on L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

⁴¹ L&S file 26/1-2, NA.

discretionary payment on authority of the Minister.⁴² A special extension up to £1250 was also introduced for bush farmers on virgin land. The amount available was again increased following the 1921 depression which had revealed the increasing inadequacy of the previous limits in the face of continually rising costs of stock and farm improvement inputs, such as fencing material, fertilizer, and machinery.

The 1916 Amendment Act also extended the provisions of the original Act to cover New Zealand discharged soldiers who had served with other forces during the war and redefined the term 'soldier' to include officers. Because many of the soldiers were under age in terms of the existing land legislation, the Government introduced special provision for the young soldiers in the War Legislation Amendment Act, 1916.

The development of the legislation in the period up to 1917 was based on the precedent of the land schemes of the 1880s and 1890s. The expansion of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act in 1917, which allowed the soldiers to receive mortgage finance to purchase private land, drew heavily on the experience of the operations of the Advances to Settlers Office which had been established in 1894.⁴³ The 1917 Amendment Act was prompted by the apparent inability of the Government to acquire land in sufficient quantity to meet present and anticipated demand. The Amendment Act allowed soldiers more flexibility in acquiring land by giving them access to the private land market, using government supplied mortgage finance. This was intended to reduce the pressure on the Department to acquire and subdivide land prior to opening it up through the ballot system.⁴⁴ Apart from the added ease for the Department the Act also allowed soldiers,

⁴² The increase in capital available from the Crown was interpreted by the Wellington War Relief Association as removing any obligation it had to assist soldiers going on to the land. State assistance was deemed adequate for all soldiers not in necessitous circumstances, Wellington War Relief Association, third annual report, 1918, p.7, WTU.

⁴³ Jourdain, *Land Legislation and Settlement*, p.52.

⁴⁴ The wartime shortage of staff had seen a reduction in the work programmes of the Department of Lands in 1917, Henderson, *The Quest for Efficiency*, p.86.

singularly or in groups, to identify a property which they were interested in and have the Government purchase it on their behalf. This land could then be declared Crown Land and be let to the soldier applicants under sections 6 and 4 of the 1915 Act, without the need for a competitive ballot. The provisions of the Amendment Act received endorsement from the RSA, which voiced its satisfaction 'that a scheme... entirely in conformity with the needs which the Association has hitherto been emphasising'.⁴⁵ The Advisory Board of the New Zealand Patriotic and War Relief Societies was also supportive, claiming 'we look on this as a deserving recognition for services rendered and congratulate the Government on its liberality'.⁴⁶

The balance of land legislation involving soldiers in the period up to 1920 related primarily to the extension of the original Act, and its amendments to a larger group of individuals who were defined as discharged soldiers or had interests congruent with those of a soldier. The 1918 Repatriation Act further defined discharged soldiers as those who were medically fit and attached to a camp of training at the end of hostilities. This was passed, much to the disgust of Brodrick, who felt that this would allow those who had not served overseas access to the best land to the detriment of the front-line soldiers.⁴⁷ The 1919 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act extended some of the benefits of the original Act, and subsequent amendments, to the widow or near relatives of discharged soldiers who had been receiving assistance under the Act. The 1919 amendment also included soldiers' widows, army nurses, and instructors in the benefits available under sections 2 and 3 of the 1917 Amendment Act, while men who might have been discharged from the Army in New Zealand prior to service and before 11 November 1918 were also

⁴⁵ Letter from the General-Secretary of the RSA to the Prime Minister, 7 January 1918, L&S file 13/25, NA.

⁴⁶ Letter from R.H. Shallcrass, Hon. Secretary of the Advisory Board of the Federation of New Zealand Patriotic and War Relief Societies, to Sir James Allen, 3 September 1917, Memoranda of the New Zealand National Efficiency Board, QMS, WTU.

⁴⁷ Brodrick diary, 5 December 1918, WTU.

included.⁴⁸ By 1920 the only soldiers who could not obtain assistance under the legislation appear to be those with dishonourable discharges.

Although the scheme for the settlement of soldiers was not an integrated and fully thought-out policy, the general consensus was that the Government was on the right lines. Notwithstanding this general endorsement, the seeds for later criticisms of the scheme had been sown, albeit for the best of intentions. The issue of lasting importance was the nature of the opportunity that the country was giving the soldiers: was it a chance to make good, or a guarantee of a successful vocation?

In a fundamental sense, the scheme was predicated on the notion of rewarding patriotism rather than the need to be cost-efficient in the development of rural land.⁴⁹ The belief that the scheme had to be carried out quickly, based on the intercessions of numerous interest groups, led the Government into policies that were initially expedient, but which subsequently were to lead to severe criticism. Perhaps the most contentious contemporary issue in the soldier settlement scheme revolved around the provision of adequate land and how this should be distributed to the soldiers.

⁴⁸ Jourdain, *Land Legislation and Settlement*, p.191.

⁴⁹ *Evening Post*, 18 March 1916, clipping on L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

THE PROMISED LAND

Conventional historiography suggests that poor government planning for the settlement of returning soldiers led the land market, already driven by a wartime commodity price boom, to become wildly inflated and totally removed from a sense of productive reality and earning capacity. The Government's entry into the land market, directly to purchase estates and indirectly through mortgage assistance under section 2 of the 1917 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act, ensured that land prices rose dramatically. An emotive component of more recent comments on the soldier settlement scheme suggests that the soldiers were 'placed' on land that was either too rough and isolated, or on sections of repurchased land that were poorly subdivided, and of dubious quality, the inference being that the soldiers had little choice in the matter and were victims of uncaring and incompetent government policies.

An implication of this received wisdom is that the Government and its officers were inept and imprudent in their selection and purchase of land and paid excessively high prices for that which was acquired. A further implication is that there was a conspiracy of sorts in that the Reform Party, being the farmers' Government, had somehow conspired to enrich the large and politically powerful landowners.¹ A.D. McIntosh and W.B. Sutch, writing in 1939, claimed that the settlement scheme was unsuccessful because the Government's intervention into the land market had pushed values beyond economic levels.² Thus the land boom, combined with the poor quality of the land made available to the soldiers, led to an inevitable crop of failures.³

This section will view government policy in detail, highlighting problems associated with providing Crown Land, the conservative purchase practices used to

¹ Simpson, *A Vision Betrayed*, pp.156-157.

² McIntosh and Sutch, 'Opening Up the Country', p.38.

³ *ibid.*, p.60.

acquire settlement land, the problems of obtaining reliable valuations, and the efforts made to appeal to the patriotic sentiments of the landowning community. The eventual government policy which emerged from the war years was a response to all these factors, and was intended to provide access to all classes and types of land throughout the Dominion.⁴ The soldiers were to decide for themselves which type of land best suited their requirements.

The demand for land is very keen quite apart from the soldier applicants, but the prices are fixed not so much by the demand as by the returns to be expected from any piece of land. No one would give more for a section than he thought he could earn a fair return on at current prices of produce.⁵

The state is chiefly to blame for creating the boom in land values. It forced the market against itself, and compelled soldiers to compete against each other for the limited amount of improved land on the market.⁶

These two quotations indicate the variety of interpretations placed upon the rising value of the land. The first is prior to the arrival of the depression, while the second reflects opinion during the depression. The *Evening Post* noted in March 1916 that the inflation of land values had exercised a material influence in checking government land purchase: 'at current prices it is very difficult to put settlers on the land on terms that will allow them a reasonable chance of success'.⁷ This suggests that the major factor in the rising value of agricultural land prior to 1918 was the increased returns from farm commodities.⁸ In October 1917, Massey publicly expressed his expectation that New Zealand land prices would tumble once the Government had introduced higher rates of land tax to fund the

⁴ Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1917, p.3.

⁵ *Hawkes Bay Herald*, Hastings, 11 October 1920, clipping on L&S file 26/1-3, NA.

⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, Napier, 23 February 1921, clipping on L&S file 26/1-3, NA.

⁷ *Evening Post*, 4 March 1916, clipping on L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

⁸ Some American evidence suggests that in the Mid-West of the United States the real boom in land prices occurred after the soldiers had returned home and that the demand was fuelled, not by speculators but, rather, by the proceeds of the high prices received for commodities in the two good years of 1917 and 1918, in the hands of farmers sons. See Black and Hyson 'Post-War Soldier Settlement', p.32.

war.⁹ The financial community, however, considered that high wartime prices being received for commodities, combined with full employment and encouraged by the depleted labour force, meant that land prices would remain high. Land agents were concerned that land taxation would lower land values.¹⁰ The great rise in land prices actually negated the effect of the land tax, based as it was on government valuations rather than on market value. Because of a lack of staff, and heavy demands for the valuation of soldier properties, the Valuation Department was unable to carry out county revaluations quickly enough to keep pace with market values which meant, in turn, that government valuations lagged well behind the market.¹¹

According to the economist Horace Belshaw, the underlying motivation of land transfer in New Zealand during the period 1890-1920 was the expected profit to be obtained on the progressively increasing value of land, rather than profits from farming itself. Expectation that the price of land should increase was dependent upon both the current value of the commodities produced on the farm, and the expected increase of the value of these commodities over time. According to this scenario, land values at time of purchase were almost always in excess of the capacity of the properties to sustain from current production. Most land was, therefore, over-valued at the time of purchase, which meant that few purchasers could expect to service their debts and make a comfortable living from farm production. The system was sustained on the back of progressively increasing returns from farm production through the period up to 1921. The land market reached boom proportions in the period 1918-1920. Belshaw claimed that wartime commodity prices and unrealistically high expectations of post-war commodity markets, and associated speculative activities, produced an upward spiral of land values that increased the burden of debt on many farms.¹²

⁹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 October 1917, p.20.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Condliffe, *New Zealand in the Making*, pp.243-247.

¹² Belshaw, 'Agricultural Credit and the Control of Land Values', p.78.

In 1920 Christopher Turnor visited New Zealand as a representative of the Royal Colonial Institute of London on a follow-up mission to Sir Henry Ryder Haggard's 1916 visit.¹³ As an outside observer, Turnor's commentary is significant. He was shocked at the price of land and observed that it was 'fairly exorbitant - much dearer than the United Kingdom'.¹⁴ Turnor foresaw the impact of the 'inevitable slump' and considered that the combination of high ruling prices for land and the slump in commodity prices would 'cause financial disaster to many [settlers] and delay the nation's progress'. In attributing causes for the booming land market, Turnor noted the contribution of the Government's land purchase programme for soldiers. However, he considered that the more 'active' factors were the high commodity returns caused by the war, increased production, and the efficiency of factory processing of agricultural commodities. A further cause noted by Turnor was that, 'the spirit of speculation is rife in the land, not helped by the mischievous activities of land agents'.¹⁵

In 1922 the RSA magazine, *Quick March*, ran an editorial which placed a somewhat different complexion on the land boom:

It cannot be denied that in many cases prices were paid for land far in excess of the true value. Here, again, the soldiers helped do the damage, as in 1918 and 1919 returned soldiers simply made New Zealand ring, "we want land", "we want land", and up went the prices accordingly.¹⁶

¹³ In 1916 Ryder Haggard had visited the Dominions to ascertain the potential for post-war imperial soldier immigration and land settlement. See John A. Shultz, 'Finding Homes Fit For Heroes: The Great War and Empire Settlement', *Canadian Journal of History*, 18(1), 1983, pp.99-110; Keith Williams, "'A Way Out of Our Troubles": The Politics of Empire Settlement', *Emigrants and Empire: British Settlement in the Dominions Between the Wars*, Stephen Constantine, (ed.), Manchester, 1990, pp.22-44; Kent Fedorowich, 'The Assisted Emigration of British Ex-Servicemen to the Dominions, 1914-1922', *Emigrants and Empire: British Settlement in the Dominions Between the Wars*, Stephen Constantine (ed.), Manchester, 1990, pp.45-71.

¹⁴ Christopher Turnor, 'Land Settlement for Ex-Servicemen in the Overseas Dominions', *Report of the Royal Colonial Institute*, London, 1920, p.25, WTU.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *Quick March*, 10 March 1922, p.28.

The development and transmission of an image of the Government's role in land purchase for soldier settlement can be traced in newspapers whose editorial viewpoints reflected the long-standing argument between the freehold Reformers and the leasehold Liberals. The argument was a moral and ideological one between the ethos of economic individualism, which allowed for speculation in land, and the moral necessity for the community to make special provision for the soldiers who had defended the country. Underpinning the moral component was the abstraction that soldiers had, by their sacrifice, defended the value of the land brought about by the wartime prices.¹⁷ In 1919, returning soldiers on board the troopship *Northumberland* expressed the opinion that 'the wartime values [of land] belong to the soldier and sailor who fought to win them'.¹⁸ They advocated the acquisition of land at pre-war prices. In November 1919 the RSA claimed that as returned soldiers represented eight per cent of the population they deserved eight per cent of the £150 million which had been added to the Dominion's land values by winning the war.¹⁹

This conflict of interest between soldiers and the existing landowning farmers was never adequately resolved during the course of the soldier settlement scheme. The soldiers and the Liberal-minded newspapers advocated State intervention to compulsorily acquire the necessary land, at pre-war prices, under the Lands for Settlement Act, so that the soldiers would be equitably rewarded for their service. The Reform leadership was not averse to this policy during the early period of the war and Massey had actually included special provision for compulsory purchase in the 1916 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act. However, it had been ruled out as a viable option by 1919 because of the numbers of soldiers

¹⁷ RSA Minute book 7, 4 May 1920, pp.1-2, RSA Headquarters, Wellington.

¹⁸ A letter dated 2 May 1919, from nine soldiers on board the troopship *Northumberland*, to the Officer Commanding, requesting that the suggestions included in the letter on behalf of some 200 men, be forwarded to the Minister of Lands. L&S file 26/1-5, NA.

¹⁹ *Liberator*, 15 November 1919, p.3.

wanting land, and the speed of their return.²⁰ Government's reluctance to press the large landowners through either compulsory purchase, or a stringent land taxation regime, was interpreted as a sign of collusion between these interests, working to the detriment of the best interests of the returning soldiers. Paddy Webb observed in the House of Representatives that:

The land purchase system is a mere farce; it is just filling the pockets of the men who have the land to sell, and who have demanded the largest price they can for their land, the value of which has been created by the community.²¹

This revealed the division within New Zealand society between those perceived by the working class and the Liberal newspapers to have power and influence, and who were thus able to convert a large amount of the nation's resources to their own use, and those who were, by their lack of capital, unable to obtain a 'competency'.²² The laissez-faire land distribution mechanism, which Miles Fairburn suggests the Liberals had earlier seen as flawed, was the Reform Government's key to the provision of land for the soldiers.²³ Despite on-going Liberal notions of the interventionist role of the State as a welfare provider which Reform inherited, the free market remained the mechanism which dictated the value of land. The soldiers' moral right to the land was not questioned and the State, as the agency for the men's service, was seen by the community as being responsible for providing the land.²⁴ Allowing for the strongly held community belief of New Zealand's landed abundance, any failings in the provision of land had to be failings of the distributive mechanism, namely the Government, through the Department of Lands and Survey and its officers.

²⁰ *NZPD*, 14 June 1916, p.845. In the debate Massey expressed the view that if insufficient land was forthcoming he would apply the compulsory provisions included in the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act.

²¹ P.C. Webb, Labour Member for Grey, *NZPD*, 11 October 1917, p.57.

²² Fairburn, *The Ideal Society*, p.264.

²³ *ibid.*, pp.263-264.

²⁴ Fairburn has noted that New Zealanders looked to the State as the provider of land in the tradition of Arcadianism.

CHAPTER 5

LAND DISTRIBUTION MANAGEMENT

The provision of land by the Government was the central component of the soldier settlement scheme. In the absence of viable Crown Land reserves of settlement quality, the authorities were forced to return to a policy of improved private land purchase using the earlier Land for Settlements legislation. To provide further land resources for distribution to soldiers, increased native land purchase was undertaken along with investment in the reclamation of swamp lands in Waikato, Bay of Plenty, and Hawkes Bay. The 1917 amendment to the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act allowed for the Government to advance mortgage capital to soldiers for the freehold purchase of private and native land, or the lease of freehold and Crown Land. By these methods the Government was able to settle some 10,500 men on the land between the beginning of 1916 and the end of 1923. [see chapter 15] This feat of organisation must be seen in the context of the administrative machinery available for the delivery process, and the state of the land resources of the country at the time.

The distribution mechanisms for state land settlement were centred on the Department of Lands and Survey, organised with an Undersecretary for Lands acting as permanent head of the Department, based in Wellington and reporting to the Minister of Lands. J. McKenzie, T.N. Brodrick, and J.B. Thompson were the successive Undersecretaries responsible for the scheme between 1915 and 1930. The country was divided into eleven Land Districts roughly corresponding to the old provincial boundaries, although the North Auckland district was created in 1919. Each Land District was headed by a Commissioner of Crown Lands who acted as the Chairman of a regional advisory Land Board composed of three government appointees, normally well-respected farmers or businessmen, and one person elected by local Crown tenants. These Boards supervised land administration and had considerable discretionary powers to allocate land and arrange ballots, deal with transfer of leases, arrears of rent, fulfilment of settlement

conditions, and surrender and termination of tenancies. In each land district a Crown Lands Ranger was responsible for the supervision of leaseholders and the protection of the State's investment. Subsequently, an officer called the Supervisor of Soldier Settlements was added to the staff of each Land District to carry out inspections and provide advice specifically for soldier settlers [see chapter 11]. The tabulation and collection of rents were carried out by regional offices.

In addition to this administrative structure, a Land Purchase Officer was based at the head office of the Department in Wellington and acted with a Land Purchase Board made up of the Undersecretary of Lands, the Surveyor-General and, in each land district, the Commissioner of Crown Lands and a resident expert farmer. This Board was primarily responsible for inspecting and negotiating the purchase of privately held estates for later subdivision. The Land Purchase Board was also responsible for the purchase of properties under section 3 of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act, 1917.¹ After much public criticism, the Land Purchase Board was enlarged in early 1920 to include committees in each of the land districts, with a Dominion Board in Wellington to make final recommendations to the Minister. During the war years, decisions on the purchase of specific estates were made at cabinet level on the recommendation of the Undersecretary.²

The Land Purchase Boards and the Land Boards employed valuers from both the Valuation Department and the private sector to establish equitable values. The mechanics of the process involved with private property purchases meant that subdivision was turned over to the local Commissioner of Crown Lands, with subdivisional surveying being carried out by the Surveyor-General's Office in the

¹ This allowed soldiers to find properties on the open market and then have them purchased by the Crown and declared Crown Land, with the soldier then able to lease the property under various tenures available.

² In Massey's long absences from the country, Sir James Allen, the Acting Prime Minister, maintained an extensive correspondence with him and these letters reveal that it was a cabinet decision whether to purchase estates under the Land for Settlements legislation. These letters also indicate that Cabinet had input in the approval of mortgage finance to individual soldiers under section 2 of the 1917 Amendment Act, Allen papers 9, Miscellaneous Correspondence, NA.

Department of Lands and Survey. In the case of private properties purchased by soldiers with mortgage finance provided under section 2 of the 1917 Amendment Act, the Land Board was responsible for an examination of the property, usually with reports from two or more 'uninterested' valuers, and for making a recommendation to the Undersecretary and Minister.³

Section 2 allowed for the purchase of the freehold of any private land or 'Native' land, and the acquisition of the lease of any Crown land, settlement land, or any other land. The section also allowed for soldiers to make application for advances to discharge existing mortgages.⁴ This became the most popular method of land acquisition for the returned soldiers and essentially involved the soldiers canvassing for their own properties, either individually or in groups.⁵ Some 4432 freehold properties and 1400 Crown leasehold properties were acquired under section 2. In the April 1918 edition of *Quick March*, a full-page advertisement appeared, signed by Massey, extolling the virtues of section 2.⁶ It operated in a way that placed the onus on the vendor who, on agreeing to sell to a soldier, had to formally offer the property to the soldier through the agency of the local Land Board. This offer was passed on by the Land Board, with recommendation, to the Minister of Lands for approval. The maximum amount of funds available to each soldier applicant was £2500 on an instalment mortgage, while £750 was also available on current account for the provision of improvements.

³ There is evidence that the Auckland Land Board made use of informal committees of experienced farmers in the evaluation of section 2 property transactions, Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1920, p.7.

⁴ Jourdain, *Land Legislation*, pp.190-191.

⁵ Fathers could sell land to their returned soldier sons under the Act, although these cases were, according to Guthrie, invariably referred to Cabinet and that each case was dealt with on its merits. The land had to have been deemed suitable for the soldier's purpose by the local Land Board. Cabinet ruling, 28 January 1920, L&S file 26/1-6, NA.

⁶ *Quick March*, 25 April 1918, p.10.

The primary problem associated with the operation of this section was in obtaining accurate values.⁷ The scheme also placed a premium on the services of the Valuation Department staff to provide values to the Lands Boards. However, the Boards were not obliged to request this service and could determine for themselves the value of a property. An agreement between the Department of Lands and Survey and the Valuation Department required that the officers provide valuations under the criteria used for normal valuations during the war, namely the quality of the land and its pre-war productive value but, significantly, the officers were also asked to supply a supplementary estimate of the value of the property under the boom conditions then prevailing. The Valuer-General claimed that the inflated values were due to the high prices being received for agricultural and pastoral products and that the Land Boards, with two estimates before them, were in a better position to make their decision.⁸ The Valuation Department was, however, unwilling to tender advice on the amount of capital that could be advanced with a soldier's property as security because, it was claimed, 'the Lands Board can be flexible in considering factors [doing the best for the soldier?] that the Valuation Department can't in dealing with factors fixing value of land'.⁹

By the end of January 1920, the Valuer-General was forced to withdraw his valuers from soldier settlement work because their primary task of county revision had become severely neglected and this was creating confusion in the land market and placing local bodies in difficult positions regarding rating roll values.¹⁰ The

⁷ The whole nature of the process of valuation of land in New Zealand requires a study. Many of the points brought up in this thesis, in relation to the boom years and the problems of revaluation, still afflict the valuation process today. (Personal communication with Peter Loveridge, Valuation New Zealand, Palmerston North, 1991). Condliffe observed that there was no way to 'scientifically' check the accuracy of valuations and that there was always some disparity between government valuation and selling price. Condliffe, *New Zealand in the Making*, p.267.

⁸ Memo from the Valuer-General to all District Valuers, 14 August 1918, Valuation file 12/481, NA.

⁹ Memo from the Valuer-General to the District Valuer, Palmerston North, 3 April 1919, Valuation file 12/481, NA.

¹⁰ The Valuer-General had replied to criticism in the delay of his officers in valuing soldier farms by stating that he wished to be relieved of the work so that he could meet his statutory duties of revising district values which, he claimed, 'cannot be deferred any longer... otherwise the result will be a loss of land tax revenue and complaints as to the inequalities of tax liability as between one

Department of Lands found some difficulty in obtaining reliable values from private valuers in the case of estate purchases, but the problem was magnified in the case of the single farm transactions under section 2. The introduction of section 2 also allowed for private land agents to have a far greater role in the soldier settlement scheme. Although seen as the pariahs of the countryside, they were a product of the environment they exploited.

The actual procedures involving acquisition of properties under this section were not without problems, many of which contributed to a widespread belief in the incompetence of the Department of Lands. In September 1918 Guthrie had briefed Allen, the Acting Prime Minister, on the operations of section 2 and observed that the decision to approve advances to soldiers for the purchase of property was to be made by the Land Boards, and that a negative outcome would result in the parties to the transaction blaming the Government.¹¹ The Minister was correct in his summation of the position and, as the pressure of the number of soldiers seeking land rose after the armistice, so too did the complaints over the operation of section 2. These essentially revolved around the delay in reaching a decision once the soldier had submitted his request to the Land Board. The vendor also had to give a three-month option to the Government at the time of the soldier's application, but this was seen as disadvantaging the vendor while the land market was rising. The soldier applicant was also disadvantaged by the delay because he was unable to make a further application on another property until the first had been dealt with. The option delay was justified by Guthrie on the grounds that there tended to be very small margins of security in the soldier holdings, with the Department often advancing close on 100 per cent of the value of the property. Guthrie also observed that vendors wanted a reduced option period so as to limit

taxpayer and another'. Quoted in a memo from Undersecretary Thompson to the Minister of Lands, 4 August 1925, L&S file 26/1-10, NA. The Valuer-General had earlier complained that the officers of his Department were under such strain that they 'had broken down under the strain of attempting to discharge their ordinary duties as well as the extra duties cast upon them and I have been compelled to employ outside valuers', memo from the Valuer-General to Brodrick, 16 June 1919, Valuation file 12/481, NA.

¹¹ Memo from Guthrie to Allen, 5 September 1918, L&S file 26/2/9, NA.

the time available for an adequate inspection and valuation by the Land Board.¹² Until the end of 1919 delays were also occurring after the properties had been approved by the Land Boards. In reply to complaints by the Kaipara branch of the New Zealand Farmers' Union, Brodrick wrote:

The delay complained of is not the fault of the Dept., but is usually the solicitors employed by the soldiers failing to clear the titles and preparing the necessary papers. Even this is not altogether their fault for many of the titles are very difficult to clear of mortgages and mortgagees have to consent to being paid off. Again the soldiers are themselves very lax and fail to execute the papers sent to them for signature properly which of course causes delay.¹³

To combat these delays the Department of Lands and Survey appointed special solicitors to deal with the soldiers' land acquisition, including both rural and urban land.¹⁴

The evidence suggests that the formal application procedures were not always followed and that soldiers paid deposits in anticipation of Land Board approvals which were often not forthcoming at the original asking price. Reports soon surfaced of behind-the-scenes dealings between soldiers and vendors where the purchasers were willing to pay prices higher than those agreed to by the Land Board. This was achieved by the purchaser giving the vendor a second, third, or fourth mortgage on the property.¹⁵ This practice led to the apparent loss of a great deal of mortgage capital in the period after the 1921 depression. The avarice of the landowners in some of these cases, or the intervention of the Land Board to

¹² Letter from Guthrie to the Manawatu Patriotic Society, 24 October 1918, in reply to a letter from the Society to the Acting Prime Minister requesting on behalf of soldiers that the option delay be set at one month, L&S file 13/25, NA.

¹³ Letter from Brodrick to the Secretary, Helensville branch, New Zealand Farmers' Union, 9 December 1919, L&S file 26/2/9, NA.

¹⁴ *ibid.* The Auckland branch of the RSA had responded to the perceived delays in placing soldiers on the land by establishing its own land bureau which was run as a private venture. The bureau acted as a normal land agency with the exception that the normal commission on transactions was returned to the soldiers. As at 30 March 1920, the bureau had dealt with 454 applications totalling £382,982, L&S file 26/1-7, NA.

¹⁵ Memo from the Commissioner of Crown Lands, New Plymouth, to the Undersecretary for Lands, 18 June 1923, L&S file 13/25, NA.

get a better price for the soldier applicant, received comment in the press, but generally the Department was seen to be operating with a niggard hand.¹⁶ A survey of the records of both the Wellington and Auckland Land Boards suggests that more than half of the total applications for properties under section 2 were declined. The reasons were not given in every case but it was usually because the soldier was not sufficiently qualified, or the vendor was asking too high a price.¹⁷

There were dangers inherent in the section 2 scheme. Despite most of the purchase finance and the costs of development being advanced by the Government, the soldier settlers were on the margins of control by the staff of the Department of Lands.¹⁸ The only contact the Department had with these men was as mortgagor and, as will be discussed below, this resulted in these soldiers being placed into a different category from the Crown tenants when the Government provided ameliorative aid in the wake of the 1921 depression, and during the on-going difficulties in the 1920s. Various interest groups such as the National Efficiency Board and the New Zealand Council of Agriculture questioned whether the goals of closer settlement were met by section 2 as the vendor returned to the open market to compete with the soldiers for the scarce freehold land.

There were occasions where section 2 was used by a group of soldiers to initiate a group settlement. The case of the McGregor settlement near Ohingaiti, in the Rangitikei valley, serves as an example of the variety of interpretations put upon land access under section 2. The land in question was situated on the eastern bank of the Rangitikei river and held by one Ewen McGregor in the name of his wife under a fifty-year Maori leasehold, beginning in 1906. The acquisition of the lease of the property, the selection of the settlers, and the planned subdivision of the

¹⁶ On 13 March 1919, *Auckland Weekly News* described two cases where intervention on the part of the Department of Lands had secured for soldiers' land at prices somewhat reduced from that originally asked by the vendor.

¹⁷ Refer to the Minutes of the Wellington Land Board, L&S-W 12/, NA, and Auckland Land Board Minutes, Auckland Regional Archives. See also the comments of the Commissioner of Crown Land, Auckland, in reply to the findings of the Enquiry Boards, *AJHR*, C.9a, Part B, 1923, p.44.

¹⁸ Turnor, 'Land Settlement For Ex-Servicemen', p.27, noted in 1920 that section 2 was faster and involved less 'red-tape' for the soldiers.

property were all carried out by the Taihape and Hunterville Patriotic Association. The nine soldiers in question applied as individuals for mortgage finance to each purchase one-ninth of the property, the total amount being £22,500.¹⁹ The Commissioner of Crown Lands for Wellington had informed Brodrick that the Patriotic Society was particularly anxious to acquire this property because of the high demand for farms from soldiers in the district.²⁰ Some of the problems associated with this settlement, and the publicity they received will be dealt with below, but it is significant that the Government would later deny that it was responsible for the settlement. The historian of the district would not later make a distinction between this settlement and other soldier settlements in the Rangitikei area, indicating that in the public's mind all soldier settlements were seen as similar creations.²¹ Despite being essentially a private initiative, the soldier settlers on the McGregor block had considered that they were in the Government's care.

Section 3 of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act 1917, allowed soldiers individually, or in groups, to have the Crown purchase private land on their behalf.²² Section 3 was based on the Land Settlement Finance Act 1909, and appears to have been a concession to those in the community calling for group or colony settlement. It was anticipated by a member of the House, and echoed in the community, that the soldiers would naturally want to settle down together when they returned.²³ Despite this expectation the majority of the estates purchased under the Act were settled by less than four soldiers. Vendors were required to

¹⁹ L&S file 26/5/28, NA.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ S.G. Laurenson, *Rangitikei: The Day of Striding Out*, Palmerston North, 1979.

²² Section 3 operations under the 1917 Amendment Act were never substantial and approximately 122 properties, 56,285 acres in area and costing the Government £1,085,042, were purchased for 327 soldiers. More significantly, approximately 72 per cent of the section 3 purchases were in the Wellington Land District. An explanation for this is that the Land Board and the Commissioner preferred to exercise more supervisory control over these settlers than under the alternative section 2 method of purchases of small farms.

²³ *NZPD*, 11 October 1917, p.41.

offer the property in writing to the Land Board for consideration.²⁴ The Board made recommendation to the Minister who referred the application and offer to the Board of Land Purchase Commissioners for authorisation. The land might then be purchased under the Land for Settlements Act and declared Crown Land under section 4 of the original 1915 Act, with the original soldier applicants having preference.

An example of the type of transaction that could be arranged under section 3 of the legislation, and one which also highlights the problem of obtaining reliable valuations, is the case of the Heights settlement near Levin. The owner, S. Bowen, himself a returned soldier, originally proposed that the property be subdivided into four sections, one of which he would keep. The record is unclear why Bowen subsequently removed himself from the transaction, but the 1,206 acre property was purchased by the Crown on behalf of four soldiers in 1919, under section 3 of the 1917 Amendment Act, for £17,491.²⁵ The property had been given a glowing recommendation from a local valuer who reported:

I consider this could be made a very valuable property by stumping and ploughing. Lies well to the sun and is beautifully sheltered and would carry two breeding ewes to the acre.... The 4 young men who are desirous of taking up this property are all hard working, practical fellows and at £14.10.0 per acre should do very well on it.²⁶

In 1924 the District Committee of the Dominion Revaluation Board described the property in less glowing terms, noting that most of the property was swamp which was very difficult to drain because of the amount of timber in it, that there was an area of waste land in a gorge that could not be safely grazed, that the property was very badly grassed, and the climate was bad and the summers were against the

²⁴ The Minutes of the Taranaki Land Board reveal a proposal where a group of soldiers and their supporters put a case for the purchase of a property which the Board decided to inspect with the prospective applicants, L&S-NP 10/15, NA.

²⁵ Report of the Lands For Settlement Act, 1908, *AJHR*, C.5, 1920, p.6.

²⁶ Report of Valuer, R.B. Martin, on application to purchase private land under section 3 of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act, 1917, 1 May 1919, L&S file 21/177, NA.

harvesting of crops. The Board considered that only a man with capital could adequately farm the property.²⁷ This shows the difficult position in which poor or inadequate valuations placed members of the Land Boards when dealing with section 3 requests. By 1925 all four soldiers on the Heights settlement had abandoned the property, which was sold by the Crown to a neighbouring landowner.

Section 3 transactions also gave scope to those interest groups who had expressed dissatisfaction at being left out of the settlement process for soldiers on existing Crown Land. As an example, the seven soldier applicants for the Te Whiti settlement in the Wairarapa were selected by the Wairarapa Patriotic Society and were, according to the Society, all suitable men.²⁸ The Land Board had obtained three valuations for the 365 acre property ranging from £85 to £90 per acre, and eventually recommended that the property be purchased for £88 per acre. On 6 September 1919, the Chairman of the Land Purchase Commissioners notified the various interested government departments that the purchase had been completed and that the date of delivery of the property was to be fixed between the vendors and the Masterton Patriotic Society, 'representing the applicants'.²⁹ In this case there appears to have been significant involvement by the patriotic society and, allowing for the composition of the societies, it is probable that local notables with interests in local body politics, the A & P Association, repatriation committee, and Farmers' Union were involved. The Taikorea settlement in the Manawatu sand country was also primarily dealt with by the Bulls Patriotic Society, which arranged for the sale of the property, picked the settlers, and sent in their section 3 applications.³⁰

²⁷ Report of the Dominion Revaluation Board, 3 July 1924, L&S file 21/177, NA.

²⁸ Memo from the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Wellington, to the Undersecretary for Lands, 1 September 1919, L&S file 26/5/23, NA.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ L&S file 21/203, NA.

When Massey introduced the 1917 Amendment Bill to the House he claimed that the experience of the previous two years had shown it to be necessary,³¹ although up to that point only 514 discharged soldiers had acquired land under the original Act. The Amendment Act took the pressure off the Land Purchase Board by placing the onus on the individual soldiers to find their properties, but at the same time it gave the soldiers a degree of flexibility in acquiring properties in their local areas. Massey appears to have been trying to limit the political damage that was emerging from the various criticisms of the scheme made by interest groups and Liberal parliamentarians. The advantages for the soldier applicants were recognised by the RSA which in 1918 entreated Guthrie to concentrate land acquisition for soldiers under the Land Finance Act.[meaning the provisions of the 1917 amendment]³²

The available evidence suggests that the 1917 Amendment Act had been passed in haste as a response to political pressure. A month after the passing of the Act Brodrick was still waiting for clarification of some of the major administrative details from Massey.³³ The Act provided assistance parallel to that available from the Advances to Settlers Office. However, the Advances Office limit of a 75 per cent advance on the total value of properties was not observed in the case of Land Boards authorising purchases under section 2. These approvals often amounted to almost 100 per cent of the value of properties. In reply to later criticisms of the handling of the scheme, Brodrick made a petulant comment to Guthrie that the soldiers were being treated much more generously than civilian settlers.³⁴

³¹ *NZPD*, 11 October 1917, p.34.

³² Remit passed at the RSA conference, Auckland, 1918, L&S file 26/1-3, NA.

³³ Memo from Brodrick to Massey, 16 November 1917, L&S file 13/25, NA. Brodrick had noted in his diary the difficulty he had in getting Massey to attend adequately with the varied matters of land settlement and noted that some matters had been awaiting Massey's attention for a long time. Brodrick Diary, 31 July, 1917, WTU. On 7 December he noted: 'Had a short time with Mr Massey but it is too short to really consider the regulations for soldier settlement. *I suppose I will have to fix them myself as usual.*[emphasis added] On 14 February 1918 Brodrick observed in his diary: 'Mr Massey told me that he was so much overworked that he feared a breakdown'.

³⁴ Memo from Brodrick to Guthrie, 7 October 1919, L&S file 13/25, NA.

As a means of access to the land, Section 2 was quickly embraced by discharged soldiers.³⁵ The increase in the popularity was directly related to the increasing numbers of returning soldiers. Some 25,000 had returned by late 1918. The section also allowed for the involvement of various interest groups such as the local patriotic societies, and, until its abolition in early 1919, local committees of the National Efficiency Board. This direct involvement could give concrete expression to local communities' patriotic impulses. It also gave the land agents of the country a much more direct involvement in the settlement of soldiers than had been possible while settlement was restricted to Crown and settlement land.

³⁵ By April 1918 increasing numbers of section 2 applications were being recorded in the Minutes of the Wellington Land Board, L&S-W 12/17, NA.

CHAPTER 6

THE PROMISED LAND

In 1915, the Department of Lands and Survey was faced with a shortage of quality Crown Land and it lacked a land settlement system that would provide orderly and deliberate access to land for a large number of settlers. The shortage of first-class land for settlement was well established. The 1899 Annual Report of the Department of Lands and Survey had voiced concern at the increasing shortage of land suitable for settlement.¹ This concern resulted in the Department undertaking an investigation into the existing areas of Crown Land and it was reported in 1903 that most of the area under the Department's control was unsuitable for farming.² Given the strong public support for 'closer settlement', and the consequent emphasis on the virtues of the rural life, it was inevitable that the time would come when the land available for settlement would be on the margins of profitability and hence, would prove more vulnerable to the vagaries of the world commodity markets than more established properties on better-quality land.

The initial reports of the Commissioners of Crown Lands that were returned to the Undersecretary for Lands in mid-1915 suggested that a total of 1,239 farm sections were available from existing Crown reserves, although the brief to the Commissioners had been to find land particularly suited to fruit farming. Of these sections, the total of 518 for the Otago district included an estimated 500 25-acre fruit farms which could be provided only when irrigation had been provided. The Taranaki report suggested that 233 sections could be provided, but added the proviso that a considerable number of the sections were known to be unsuitable because of the difficulty of providing road access. Canterbury office provided a nil return, while the Commissioner of Crown Lands for Wellington reported that 283 sections were available; half in the Hutt Valley as one or two acre propositions,

¹ Annual Report of the Department of Lands and Survey, *AJHR*, C.1, 1899, p.VII.

² Annual Report of the Department of Lands and Survey, *AJHR*, C.1, 1903, p.I.

and the balance as country sections.³ None of the 95 sections in Southland were suitable for orchards.⁴ Although there is some doubt that the details in these reports came to the notice of Massey and Bell until October 1915, the reality was that the soldier land settlement scheme was being promoted despite an existing shortage of suitable Crown Land.⁵

The public was not generally aware of this situation, and the notion of untapped millions of acres continued to provide inspiration to those who saw the land scheme as the revitalising agent for New Zealand society. G. E. Alderton, a correspondent to the *New Zealand Farmer*, complained that city editors and newspaper writers knew little of the true nature of land settlement when they suggested New Zealand had millions of acres awaiting exploitation and he observed: 'There is probably no subject which the public generally know so little about as the practical work essential to its successful settlement'.⁶ Rather than admit to a difficulty of providing land, Massey indulged in some creative disinformation, claiming in early 1916 that approximately half a million acres had been set aside for the settlement of soldiers.⁷ This figure represented almost the total existing Crown reserves, including some of the most marginal land. Massey also claimed that most of it was 'good land in good localities with good access'.⁸ Most of this 'good' land was in the North Island, a fact not lost on southern Members of Parliament.⁹

³ Memo from the Undersecretary for Lands to A.L. Herdman, Minister-in-Charge of the Discharged Soldiers' Information Department, 10 September 1915, L&S file 22/635/14, NA.

⁴ Memo from the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Southland, to the Undersecretary for Lands, 28 June 1915, L&S file 26/11, NA.

⁵ Brodrick noted in his diary on 28 October 1915, that he had to prepare at short notice a statement of soldier lands for the Minister. Presumably this was Massey, but it may have been Sir Francis Bell who was carrying much of the Lands portfolio at this time.

⁶ *New Zealand Stock and Station Journal*, August 1916, p.1175.

⁷ The 1918 annual report of the Department of Lands and Survey suggests that a total of 394,219 acres had been proclaimed under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act.

⁸ *Dominion*, 10 January 1916, cutting on L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

⁹ J. Anstey, Member for Waitaki, *NZPD*, 14 June 1916, p.871.

Evaluation of suitable land for soldier settlement was tied to the expected requirements of those soldiers to be helped under the scheme. The original intention of the scheme had been to provide small, easily worked, accessible sections for soldiers recovering from wounds and illness. The 1915 debate on the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Bill had focused on fruit farms. The enlargement of the scheme from about early 1916 to include other forms of farming relieved the Department of Lands of the pressure to provide that single class of land. All Crown Land in the country was evaluated and scheduled for subdivision.¹⁰ This included National Endowment, forestry and education reserves, and even marginal high altitude land. Purchased Maori land was also earmarked for subdivision. In part, this explains why men appeared to opt for land that would subsequently prove unsuitable to their particular abilities and temperament. Despite the later claims by the Government that the soldiers dictated the type of land they desired, it is also true that the Government, for the best of intentions, sign-posted the direction of interest.

Debate about the type of land that would be most suitable for the returning soldiers had been strident in the press and other public forums. Opinion varied, but the debate essentially centred on the choice of two types of land: unimproved bush land, or improved grazing and dairy land. The advocates of unimproved land couched their argument in terms of the benefits to the country from the new production on virgin land, and the personal returns the soldiers would reap by the improvements to the land that they had created with their own labour.¹¹ The traditional New Zealand belief in the benefits of the unearned increment came through strongly here. Under this scenario, the increase in the value of the land outstripped the true value of the improvements made by the settler during the course of his occupation. This extra profit could be re-couped on sale of the property. The supporters of settlement on virgin country perpetuated the myth that

¹⁰ Memo from Brodrick to Guthrie, 6 July 1918, L&S file 26/1-3, NA.

¹¹ The Member for Marsden claimed 'there was unlimited opportunity for the Government placing soldiers on unimproved lands of good quality, so that honest toil would give them the full value of their increment, and good living', *Auckland Star*, 3 May 1919, clipping on L&S file 26/2/9, NA.

millions of acres awaited the pioneers' axes, while they also eyed with avarice some of the better remaining Maori land. This group was highly critical of the policy of subdividing purchased land and based its argument on the expense to the country of repurchasing private land. Those urging the settlement of unimproved land also tended to advocate colony-type settlement for returned soldiers.

In 1917, in support of those advocating soldier settlement on unimproved lands, the *Auckland Weekly News* suggested that 'the immediate purpose of the Government should be to settle land now idle, unoccupied and unproductive'.¹² This added weight to some serious suggestions put forward for the settlement of land that even for contemporaries, familiar as they were with the settlements on the upper reaches of the Wanganui river, bordered on the absurd. A case in point was the suggestion of C. Lewis, a licensed surveyor of Collingwood, that soldiers should be settled on the land at the Karamea end of the Heaphy track. This idea was passed on to Brodrick by the Member for Nelson. Sir Francis Bell, Acting Minister of Lands, replied that he could not approve the idea as the land was rough, and similar areas in the Nelson land district had not found ready sale. Lewis was persistent in his claims for the land which prompted a report from the Nelson Commissioner of Crown Lands who noted:

The land is not the kind such as soldiers present being discharged could properly work and especially such soldiers as those suffering from shell-shock or nerve rack. It would be doubly improper to put isolated settlers of that class in such remote places since the cheerless surroundings would probably seriously affect their intellects.¹³

Sir James Allen, Minister of Defence and Acting Prime Minister in Massey's absences, was on record as supporting the settlement of soldiers on unimproved sections because, he claimed, soldiers were expressing an interest in this type of

¹² *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 January 1917, p.47.

¹³ Various memos and letters, L&S file 26/7/4, NA.

land.¹⁴ He later told a deputation of the RSA that 'he was of the opinion that unimproved land was better for the soldiers, because it offered to them more prospects of big profit'.¹⁵ Sir Joseph Ward attacked the section 2 policy of small farm purchases for soldier settlement during the 1919 election campaign, on the grounds that it was contributing to the inflation of land prices and he continued to advocate the earlier Liberal policy of large estate purchases for closer settlement.¹⁶

The advocates of smaller improved section settlement were motivated by concerns for closer settlement, although their justification of a policy of improved section settlement for soldiers also hinged on the soldiers' states of mind and body. The RSA's attitude to the land question was in keeping with its advocacy role and reflected soldiers' land demands. The RSA opposed the settlement of soldiers on marginal Crown Land because of the additional need for development capital, and instead favoured purchase of improved lands nearer the towns.¹⁷ It also saw the policy of back-blocks settlement as 'unfair' while there were areas of developed land that were not being fully exploited. According to the RSA, the promotion of a scheme based on compulsory purchase would quickly settle those soldiers who wished to go on the land.¹⁸ In a discussion with Massey, W.E. Leadley Secretary of the Christchurch RSA, claimed that the Government was 'afraid' to handle the question of compulsory purchase and that this hesitancy would 'spoil its otherwise splendid record of the repatriation of returned soldiers'.¹⁹ Although RSA

¹⁴ In March 1917 Sir James Allen replied to a letter from the Inangahua County Council, 'with reference to the statement of the council that unimproved bush land would be useless for settling returned soldiers upon, I have to state... in many parts of the Dominion discharged soldiers have expressed a preference for this class of land and are doing well upon it'. Copy of a letter from Sir James Allen (Minister of Defence) to the County Clerk, Inangahua County Council, Reefton, 4 March 1917, L&S file 26/1-3, NA.

¹⁵ *Defender*, 6 June 1917, p.3.

¹⁶ *Liberator*, 15 November 1919, p.4.

¹⁷ RSA Minute Book I, pp.55-6, RSA Headquarters, Wellington.

¹⁸ According to the RSA there were 5,000 men awaiting land settlement, apart from the 7,000 already settled by the Government as at 30 March 1920.

¹⁹ Deputation of the Executive of the RSA to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Lands, 31 August 1920, L&S file 26/1-5, NA.

Headquarters supported the 'smaller but better' argument and advocated settlement close to towns and on land congruent with the rail system, branches often expressed views which reflected local concerns. For example, the Auckland branch wanted the Government to open the vast tracts of Crown Land that it perceived as lying idle, such as the Ureweras and areas in Northland and the King Country, much of which was still under Maori ownership.²⁰

At its 1919 annual conference the RSA adopted as its official policy the compulsory purchase scheme advocated by a well-known Wairarapa farmer, whereby the largest estates (those valued over £100,000) were to be tackled first, progressing down to the cheaper and poorer quality properties. The process of compulsory purchase was to continue until all the soldiers had been settled.²¹ The scheme also had the approval of the Conference of the New Zealand Farmers' Union. In discussion with the RSA, Massey prevaricated over the issue, and observed that the existing legislation for compulsory purchase was almost unworkable.

Settlement of bush lands by men who had been wounded was also opposed by officials within the Department of Lands and Survey, and it was concern for these men that lay behind early policy of purchasing improved land. In response to mounting criticism of the apparent lack of progress on the issue of opening up Crown Land, Brodrick argued that the remote regions would be dealt with 'when the fit men returned after the campaign'. Guthrie informed the House in September 1919 that this had been government policy up to the end of hostilities and that the unimproved areas of Crown Land had been held back for those 'who had been through the campaign and who would be capable of going into the backblocks and tackling land of that description when they came back'.²² Guthrie appears somewhat confused over the actual policy of the Department

²⁰ *Evening Post*, 2 May 1919, p.3.

²¹ RSA Minute Book 3, pp.186-7, RSA Headquarters Wellington.

²² *NZPD*, 9 September 1919, p.361.

because he also told the House that up to 1919 the Department had not been sending men back on to the bush country, but were holding it for returned soldiers when they were prepared to take it up'.²³ Guthrie seems to have forgotten a number of early bush settlements for soldiers on Crown Land, including two near Mangaweka in 1916, and another on the Wanganui river at Mangapurua in early 1917.²⁴

A corollary to the demands for the settlement of the unimproved lands was the expectation that public works would open roads, bridges and railways and so both reduce the difficulties for settlers and encourage them to go into that type of country. This had obvious appeal for more recently opened up areas and can be likened to the perceived benefits of the Vogel public works boom of the 1870s. Guthrie's reaction to this claim was to suggest that the Government did not have the funds to indulge in this type of development.²⁵ Brodrick had articulated the Department's objection to these suggestions in 1918 when he observed:

That allowing labour is available, its cost, plus the cost of machinery, implements, fencing, buildings, grass seed at £1.5.0 per acre plus the cost of sowing, manure, which is excessively expensive and almost unprocurable and the price of stock, essential to keep the pastures in order, managers and workmen to be paid to look after the stock - all of which expenses aggregated and weighted on to the land would make its improved value at the present time compare unfavourably with that of suitable Crown, native and settlement land which the Government is now supplying the soldiers.²⁶

Brodrick was also concerned that the labour required for land development, and the attendant public works, would have to be taken away from essential industries

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Mangapurua, the famous 'Bridge to Nowhere' settlement, was described by the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Wellington, in a 1918 report 'as all virgin bush country, which when cleared will make really good grazing farms', L&S file 26/1/4, NA. The Commissioner for Taranaki subsequently described it as easily the roughest country in the North Island. Memo to the Undersecretary for Lands, 21 November 1922, L&S file 21/296, NA.

²⁵ *NZPD*, 9 September 1919, p.361.

²⁶ Memo from Brodrick to Guthrie, 6 July 1918, L&S file 26/1-3, NA.

during wartime. The position was little changed in the immediate post-war period and the relatively easy labour market dissuaded men from hard labouring work. This was a problem for the Public Works Department in meeting its obligations to provide roads for soldier settlement blocks.

Much of the interest group advice on the type of settlement programme to be put in place had a distinct regional (and parochial) flavour. For example, both the Hastings and Palmerston North Borough Councils supported the settlement of soldiers on small sections close to their borough boundaries. The Manawatu Patriotic Society, in support of the local Council's request, demanded that the Government acquire blocks to be subdivided into small sections adjacent to towns because most soldiers would find their main employment in or near towns and, moreover, many of the men would be unsuited to farm life.²⁷ Taranaki delegates to the 1920 conference of the New Zealand Council of Agriculture proposed that the Government should purchase 'good agricultural land' for subdivision into small holdings, rather than provide financial support for soldiers to acquire houses in the towns, thus inducing people to live in the towns rather than the country.²⁸

Local communities saw benefits in having soldiers settled in their localities, although it would be unfair to dismiss all sense of altruism in these expressions of support. Other factors also provided motivation and there was a pattern of applied pressure from numerous communities. Some wanted to keep their soldiers in their home locality when they returned. The Marlborough Patriotic Society appealed to the Government for settlement of soldiers in that district because of the soldiers' enviable record over volunteer service.²⁹ The communities which might be

²⁷ Letter from the Secretary, Manawatu Patriotic Society to Massey, 24 July 1916, L&S file 26/1-2, NA; *Hawkes Bay Tribune*, 25 October 1918, clipping on L&S file 26/1-4, NA.

²⁸ Minutes of the Conference of the New Zealand Council of Agriculture, 7 July 1920, WTU.

²⁹ Letter from the Secretary, Marlborough Patriotic Society to the Minister of Lands, 18 May 1920, L&S file 26/1-6, NA. The patriotic societies were at this time facing a problem in the dispersal of their funds to the soldier settlers from their immediate area. Because local soldiers were traipsing all over the country in search of land, the patriotic societies were faced with the dilemma of the soldiers' status in terms of assistance. Most of the various funds intended for assistance for the soldiers had been donated in the belief that these would be for the help of local men. By settling in

considered as more recently developed were in favour of soldier settlement. These 'frontier' areas also tended to have reserves of Crown Land or be in areas of unalienated Native land. North Auckland, King Country, and Bay of Plenty are primary examples. Most of these requests were tied to the purchase of specific blocks, or settlement on Crown reserves. Local Members of Parliament were lobbied, while the Minister of Lands and the Prime Minister were subject to appeals from a broad range of interest groups in the localities, such as the RSA and Farmers' Union, patriotic societies, chambers of commerce, and borough or county councils. For example, on 24 April 1919 Guthrie was waited upon by a deputation representing the Whangaroa County Council and Chamber of Commerce. Members of the delegation voiced their objections to the Government's policy of improved land purchase which they considered was not in the best interests of the soldiers, or the country. After advocating the settlement of idle land they reminded the Minister that, 'we have in this county a considerable area of Crown bush ... wich [sic] we are assured by the Government valuer cannot be excelled in the North for quality'.³⁰ They presented detailed plans on how the block could be settled.

In February 1918 Massey received a letter from a land agent in Dargaville, begging him to authorise the purchase of a property that was under offer to the Government:

It is a matter of much importance to this town and at the same time a very sound proposition for the Government. Naturally I know Gordon Coates very well indeed - am one of his committee - and through your expression of being his representative I am writing to you expressing the wish of myself and practically the whole electorate in regard to the Government getting Crawford's for returned soldiers, - the soldiers will do well on this land and the

another area they ceased to be local but, at the same time, the community still felt some obligation to them. Conversely there was the issue of outsiders coming into an area to take up land and calling upon the funds of the local patriotic society. By ensuring local settlement this problem could, to some extent, be alleviated.

³⁰ Letter to the Minister from the Whangaroa delegation, 12 April 1919, L&S file 26/2/9, NA.

block will always be a source of satisfaction to yourself and your Government.³¹

The concern of North Aucklanders for the opening up of bush country is graphically illustrated in a 1919 request made to Guthrie from the Bay of Islands branch of the Farmers' Union. It wanted Crown forest reserves that did not hold good timber opened for settlement because 'development and progress are seriously hampered by these idle lands'.³² The South Island position may have been affected less by local land development concerns. The Oxford branch of the Farmers' Union advocated soldier settlement 'in order to increase production, stimulate trade, and lighten the burden of taxation'.³³

The response of the Department to the advice received from numerous interested parties was to make all classes of land available and let the soldiers decide for themselves the type of land which best suited them.³⁴ Sir James Allen told a deputation from the RSA that 'the Government was prepared to purchase any land, good, bad, or indifferent, so long as it suited the soldiers'.³⁵ The attitude adopted by the Department of Lands was that the soldier's decision was his own - convinced as it was of the virtues of economic individualism.³⁶

³¹ Letter from Colmore-Williams to Massey, 28 February 1918, L&S file 21/171, NA.

³² Letter from the Bay of Islands branch of the New Zealand Farmers' Union to Guthrie, 22 October 1919, L&S 26/2/9, NA.

³³ Letter from the Secretary, North Canterbury branch of the New Zealand Farmers' Union to Prime Minister Massey, 25 October 1918, L&S file 26/1-5, NA. They were referring to the graduated land tax and it can be suggested that the concerns of South Island interest groups for closer settlement usually meant something different than those in the North Island.

³⁴ Memo from Brodrick to the Acting Minister of Lands, 16 August 1917, L&S file 26/1-2, NA; memo from Brodrick to Guthrie, 6 July 1918, L&S file 26/1-3, NA; memo from Brodrick to Commissioner of Crown Lands, Auckland, 27 July 1918, L&S file 26/2, NA.

³⁵ *Defender*, 6 June 1917, p.3.

³⁶ Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1917, pp.2-3.

CHAPTER 7

LAND PURCHASE BOARDS

Historians have implied that the Crown entered into the land market in an indiscriminate fashion, buying poor quality land at inflated prices, and thereby at least exacerbating the land boom, if not being the primary cause of it. Powell, in his 1971 article, misunderstands the role of the Land Boards and credits them with 'spendthrift' decisions to purchase particular properties that were 'in run down condition, often over-grazed and choked with weeds'.¹ This is used as evidence of regionalism in the application of the legislation, and Powell represented the Land Boards as acting as land purchase bodies in a far more autonomous way than actually was the case. He also suggested that the influence of interest groups in obtaining land to meet the demand of the soldiers was such that the pace and location of settlement was actually removed from government hands.

The contemporary criticisms of the operations of the Land Purchase Board in relation to the provision of land for soldier settlement were more sophisticated, and fall into three categories: first, that the Board did not consult with practical 'locals' and so was remiss because it purchased properties at too high a price, or refused to purchase properties which were, according to the Board, too expensive, despite local opinion to the contrary; second, that the personnel were too few and not privy to local conditions; third, that the men on the Board were not 'practical' men and so purchased land of inferior quality. The official policy of the Board, as explained by Massey to the House, was somewhat different to the received wisdom. Massey observed: 'My instructions ... are these: If you cannot get the land at a reasonable price, and at a price at which the settlers can make a good living, leave it alone'.²

¹ Powell, 'The Debt of Honour', p.73.

² *NZPD*, 11 October 1917, p.36.

During 1916 the scope of the land settlement scheme was enlarged and in October 1916 Massey confidently informed the Pilgrims Club at the Savoy in London that 'we expect to place no less than 5000 New Zealand soldiers on the land of their own country'.³ The response of the Department of Lands and Survey was to enlarge the land purchase activities prescribed by the Land for Settlements Act 1908. J.D. Ritchie, the Land Purchase Officer from 1909, worked out of Wellington in tandem with the Undersecretary and was responsible for the inspection of properties offered to the Crown. His previous experience had been as Undersecretary for Agriculture during the Liberal period, working under Sir John McKenzie.⁴ One of Brodrick's first official inspections as newly appointed Undersecretary was of a property offered to the Department. In September 1915, accompanied by Ritchie, he looked over a property at Turakina, south-east of Wanganui. Later he noted in his diary:

Motored out to Lethbridge's... as he has offered to sell 1600 acres of it at £35 per acre to the Crown inclusive of the Dwelling. Rode all over the place. About 500 acres good flat the rest downs and hills 3/4 ploughable. We concluded it was too dear. The sheep did not look well.⁵

His pithy diary entry on the state of the property was repeated numerous times over the next four years as his duties on the Land Purchase Board took him to all corners of the country.⁶ The fact that Brodrick actually took part in these

³ 'The Call of Empire', unpublished synopsis of speeches, interviews and articles, relating to Massey, appearing in the British press 1916-17, MS 843, WTU.

⁴ T.W.H. Brooking, 'Sir John McKenzie and the Origins and Growth of the Department of Agriculture 1891-1900', MA Thesis in History, Massey University, 1972, pp. 49-50; Wild, *The Life and Times of Sir James Wilson*, p.157. Brooking credits Ritchie with restructuring the Department into a bureaucratic organisation in the years immediately after McKenzie's departure.

⁵ Brodrick diary, 3 September 1915, WTU.

⁶ The entries in Brodrick's diary regarding inspections tended to be of the larger properties offered to the Government and, in the majority of cases, those turned down by the Land Purchase Board. As an example, see the entry for 12 November 1917, when Brodrick and his staff went to Masterton to look at 'young Buchanan's property: we put up at the club hotel - Sir Walter Buchanan [member of the Legislative Council] spent the evening with us.... Young B, his nephew, motored us out to Tepurupura and we rode over 3600 acres under offer. It is a nice place but hilly and would not cut up well. His price, £27 per acre is quite £10 too high'. Sir Walter was a Reform party supporter and, in anticipation of an election in 1919, Sir James Allen had requested that Massey prevail upon Sir Walter to 'make a substantial contribution to party funds', cited in P.S. O'Connor, 'Some

inspections, accompanied by the local Commissioner of Crown Lands and, occasionally, the Minister of Lands, reflects the unsophisticated structure of the Department at the time.⁷

Part of the criticism by contemporaries of the Board was that 'local' advice was not taken before a property was purchased, but the evidence suggests otherwise. As an early example, Brodrick observed in his diary that having inspected Holmes' Tiraumea property, he 'met local dignitaries in Ekatahuna for their views'.⁸

The acquisition of Tiraumea for soldier settlement reveals the operation of the Board in some detail.⁹ The 10,242 acre property had originally come on the market in 1905 and, on the petition of the local community the Government had offered £3 5s per acre in response to the owner's £4 price. The property was sold to a private purchaser in 1906 for just under £5 per acre. In 1914 the Board enquired if the owner was interested in selling the property for closer settlement and, in June 1916, the property was placed on the market for £9 per acre. Prior to Brodrick's visit to the property on 16 October, the cabinet had discussed the property and the proposed plan for subdivision. G.W. Russell, the Liberal member for Avon and member of the National Cabinet, voiced doubts about the price of the property and the advisability of splitting it up into 20 or so small sheep farms. He was concerned about the carrying capacity of the pasture and small area of cultivatable land and suggested that it should be subdivided into four or five large holdings. Russell may have been reflecting a South Island bias for larger farm units as compared to the closer settlement mentality of North Island rural politicians. Subsequent to Brodrick's inspection the property was valued at £10.1.9 per acre. Cabinet approved an offer of £8 per acre and the Department paid

Political Preoccupations of Mr Massey, 1918-1920', *Political Science*, 18(2), 1966, p.27.

⁷ See Fairburn, *The Ideal Society*, pp.262-264.

⁸ Brodrick diary, 16 August 1916, WTU. He also observed that because of this inspection he missed the departure of his son, Paul, in the 16th Reinforcement.

⁹ The Tiraumea section is based, except as otherwise stated, on various letters and memos on L&S file 21/37, NA.

£81,984 for the property. The *Eketahuna Express* summed up the feelings in the community which for some time had been encouraging the closer settlement of the property:

The estate is easy of access and lends itself to suitable sub-division. It is also pleasing to note that the present owners have acted more than fairly in the disposal of the property and the result is that it has been acquired at a figure which should entail no undue burden on the future settlers. At the price at which the land should be available the settlement should be a great success.¹⁰

On 10 October 1918, Brodrick recorded in his diary that he and the Minister of Lands went to Tiraumea and, 'inspected this excellent property'.¹¹ However, subsequent criticism of the Government's land purchase policy focused attention on the estate. The vocal complaints of the soldier settlers over the issue of the price paid for the estate compelled Guthrie to request a special report from the Supervisor of Soldier Settlements in the Wellington Land District on 20 October 1919. The settlers claimed that the property was purchased at too high a price, which had the effect of raising the rating roll value of the sections for the purpose of levying of local body rates. The Supervisor thought the property had been purchased at the correct price, and that the settlers should not give publicity to 'foolish' requests for a revaluation of the capital values of their sections. The settlers made further representation to Guthrie, and a second inspection was ordered on 19 April 1920. The Supervisor restated his earlier opinion that the property was worth the price paid. The Wellington Land Board, in considering the position of the property and the individual settlers, concluded that the capital values were not excessive and that the problems relating to the settlement were the result of shortcomings of the soldiers themselves. Responding to criticism of the estate's purchase, Brodrick observed to the Minister that, 'it was valued in the usual careful

¹⁰ *Eketahuna Express*, 7 October 1916, quoted in a memo from Brodrick to Guthrie, 2 August 1920, L&S file 21/37, NA.

¹¹ Brodrick diary, 10 October 1918, WTU.

manner before it was bought, and it could be sold today at a much higher price than was charged to the soldiers'.¹²

In early 1921, as the depression began to be felt, Lieut. Colonel G. Mitchell, Independent Member for Wellington South and chairman of the RSA Land Committee, and G.R. Sykes, the Reform Member for Masterton, visited Tiraumea and met the settlers. A report of the meeting and Mitchell's comments were published under the title of 'Tiraumea Fiasco', in the RSA magazine, *Quick March*. In this report Mitchell was highly critical of the purchase and, after taking the advice of 'experienced people', suggested that 'it was quite questionable if the place ever showed a decent profit in pre-war years.... The place is entirely unsuitable for sub-division, unless into about six holdings, and it is especially unsuitable for disabled soldiers'. Mitchell took to task 'those' who sold the property to the Government for the settlement of soldiers but was not so critical of the Board because:

This... was one of the first estates purchased [for soldier settlement], and those responsible can be excused for making an error in judgement as the place is deceiving. But those who put it in the hands of the Government for returned soldiers must have known that the place would not pay at £8 per acre.¹³

Mitchell's comments on Tiraumea are the more creditable because of what he had to say about the Wairarapa soldier settlements in general. He claimed that had the prices for agricultural commodities remained at the high level they were when the men went on to the properties, the settlers would have been satisfied.¹⁴ Mitchell directly related the complaints of the soldiers to the state of the economy and his criticisms received official endorsement at the highest level. In reply to criticism in the House, Guthrie suggested that if the Government had regrets over the soldier settlement scheme:

¹² Memo from Brodrick to Guthrie, 2 August 1920, L&S file 21/37, NA.

¹³ *Quick March*, 10 March 1921, p.43.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.28.

it was the purchase of some land that was not really suitable for subdivision.... Tiraumea was an example of a property that had given good results as a single estate, but had not made satisfactory subdivisions.... the land was not suitable for closer settlement'.¹⁵

Guthrie's comments are a reflection of the developing recognition in government circles that the issue of soldier settlement was becoming politically damaging, but his use of the blanket claim that the property was little use for closer settlement hides the fact that the estate was well-known, had been inspected by qualified officials and subdivided with the expectation that the soldiers could make a living from the sections. Guthrie fudged the issue of responsibility and could not admit that the property was simply poorly subdivided, as this would have required publicly criticising the Department for which he was responsible.¹⁶

The difficulties on Tiraumea were put down by Guthrie to the result of an injudicious purchase at the start of the settlement programme, rather than a combination of departmental incompetence and the soldiers' unsuitability. The excuse made by Mitchell that the purchase was one of the first, ignores the whole land for settlements process that had begun in the early 1890s. What was being reflected in this process was essentially an inefficient land purchase system being subjected to close scrutiny for the first time because of the underlying emotional issues and sense of obligation to returned soldiers. Guthrie's comment is also suggestive of poor public relations on the part of the Government, something that Brodrick had previously been critical of in relation to public statements by the Minister.¹⁷

The debate on the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Bill in 1915 had revealed long-standing dissatisfaction with the operations of the Land Purchase Board. J. Anstey,

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 10 August 1922, p.31.

¹⁶ A close reading of the settlement file reveals that the soldiers selected were infirm from war injuries. However, not all the soldiers were in financial difficulty at the times the various reports were made. L&S file 21/37, NA.

¹⁷ Brodrick diary, 4 September 1918, WTU.

the Liberal Member for Waitaki, observed that in the past the Board had made expensive and unwise purchases.¹⁸ He repeated these claims during the debate of the 1916 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Bill, claiming that there had had to be revaluations and rent reductions.¹⁹ During the debate of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Bill in 1917, Guthrie acknowledged that the Board was not efficient in its operations and needed to put itself in touch with some local information in the districts. He observed that 'the general impression throughout this country is that you have not on that Board the practical knowledge that is required for the selection of land in different parts of New Zealand'.²⁰ He also observed that two of the members of the Board had only South Island experience while the third had been office-bound.²¹ These comments cannot be taken at face value, however, because his criticism was generated, not so much by unwise purchases of expensive land, as by the fact that the Board had not purchased certain lands in his district (Manawatu/Rangitikei) which had been offered to the Government at 'reasonable' prices. This is in contrast with a statement by Guthrie after his 1918 appointment as Minister of Lands, in reply to a demand for the establishment of boards of local competent settlers to provide valuations of properties purchased for soldier settlers. He then claimed:

It is recognised that the Department has in many instances to pay full market value, but the Land Purchase Board will not acquire land on which it is considered the soldier cannot occupy successfully at the price given.... the Land Purchase Board [is] composed of highly qualified gentlemen in addition to having services of expert officers of the Lands department.²²

These men were the same officials whom Guthrie had criticised in 1917. His earlier observations were an interesting reflection of the dominating concern of the

¹⁸ *NZPD*, 24 September 1915, p.224. This reflects the divisive nature of land issues in the New Zealand political environment during the early twentieth century.

¹⁹ *NZPD*, 14 June 1916, p.871.

²⁰ *NZPD*, 11 October 1917, p.55.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Letter from Guthrie to the Eketahuna County Clerk, 19 March 1919, L&S file 13/25, NA.

community that the scheme of soldier settlement should be expedited with all haste and that the market should fix the value.

Pressure of returning troops was both straining the machinery of the Department of Lands, and prompting interest groups to intensify their demands for greater land purchase activity on the part of the Government.²³ At the beginning of March 1918, Brodrick confided to his diary that 'the Land Purchase Board meetings are held so often that I seldom record them'.²⁴ Notwithstanding this comment, and despite the impression that the Government was reacting quickly to facilitate the settlement of soldiers, the Department of Lands continued to exercise restraint in its land purchase dealings. The finance and land-dealing fraternity objected to this policy, claiming in many instances that the Board was rejecting properties as being too expensive while similar properties were being worked profitably. A manager for the New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency in Taranaki claimed that it was not the high cost of the land which would determine the success of the soldier settlement scheme but the experience of the settlers themselves.²⁵

By mid-1918 a number of local bodies had become sufficiently concerned at the Department's perceived failings, notably the slow rate of placement of discharged soldiers and the use of unsuitable land, that submissions were made to impress upon the Minister the need for people with local knowledge to be involved in the land purchase process.²⁶ The suggestions that the Board was ill-fitted for the task continued unabated during the period up to the armistice. During the course of the Repatriation Bill through the House in December 1918, T.W. Rhodes, Reform Member for Thames, criticised the Board for turning down properties that 'experienced men considered in every way suitable for the purpose of soldier

²³ A motion to this effect was carried by the 1919 conference of the New Zealand Council of Agriculture, Minutes of 1919 conference, WTU.

²⁴ Brodrick diary, 11 March 1918, WTU.

²⁵ Letter from the Manager of the New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency, New Plymouth to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Taranaki, 11 March 1919, L&S file 21/149, NA.

²⁶ See letters from various local bodies on L&S file 26/1-2, NA.

settlements'.²⁷ But criticism of the operations of Board also came from within the Department of Lands structure. The Marlborough Land Board expressed concern that the Land Purchase Board did not consult it when purchasing properties in its land district. Brodrick passed this complaint on to the acting Minister of Lands with the following minute: 'This is a matter of policy but it is very doubtful if Land Boards or local bodies are in a position to be at all helpful in purchasing land'. He concluded with a testy hand-written remark: 'We have too many irresponsible opinions voiced'.²⁸ This indicates the pressure that Brodrick was under from politicians to both enact the will of the people and to keep spending on land within budgeted limits.²⁹

Officers of the National Efficiency Board also criticised the Government's land purchase policy. As an example, the Chairman of the Opunake Board of trustees of the National Efficiency Board, E. Maxwell, intervened on behalf of H. Stonex who had offered 400 acres to the Department for soldier settlement. After inspection by the Commissioner and others it was given an unfavourable report. Maxwell claimed that it could be subdivided into four 100 acre dairy farms at a cost of £10 per acre and that Stonex was willing to accept war bonds for much of the price. He commented that he could not 'understand how an unfavourable report could have been given as I know the property well and am satisfied that it is most suitable for the purpose'.³⁰ The Land Purchase Board report showed that the

²⁷ NZPD, 4 December 1918, p.810. Rhodes wanted a special organisation established to acquire land for soldiers, by compulsory purchase if necessary.

²⁸ Memo from Commissioner of Crown Lands, Blenheim, to Brodrick, no date, 1917, L&S file 21/61, NA.

²⁹ The Wellington Commissioner of the National Efficiency Board in a letter to the Secretary, Efficiency Board of Trustees, Gisborne, 13 November 1917, observed: 'Everyone at the present time is crying out for the returned soldier to be put on the land, and the Government is influenced a great deal by the popular cries of the people', National Efficiency Board/Wellington file 2/724, NA. In March 1916, Brodrick attended a briefing given by Sir Joseph Ward, Minister of Finance where all permanent Heads were requested to restrict spending and prepare for an expected depression following the war. This is not as prophetic as it first appears as Sir Joseph expected the war to end sometime around October 1916. Brodrick diary, 16 March 1916, WTU.

³⁰ Letter from Maxwell to the Commissioner, Wellington National Efficiency Board, August 1917, National Efficiency Board/Wellington file 2/724, NA. The Board's local committees of trustees were made up of experienced local farmers charged with the task of operating soldiers' farms while they served.

local Land Board and an outside farmer had inspected the property and that it was in a very rough state and would require a large expenditure to bring it into condition for possible subdivision into two holdings only, and not at the price asked by the vendor.³¹ The Wanganui-Waitotara Board of Trustees of the National Efficiency Board had complained that although there was much land available in its district, little had been purchased. It suggested that, to improve the acquisition and dispersal of this land a member of the National Efficiency Board, 'because of intimate local knowledge', should be on the Land Purchase Board.³²

Guthrie, in a typically political defence of the operations of the Government in the land purchase sphere, told the House that the greatest care was being exercised and, despite the calls for the inclusion of experienced farmers in the purchase process, the Government was already doing this without advertising the fact.³³ This indicates confusion over just how the Government was purchasing land, and how far the confusion extended even within government circles. Guthrie was referring to the processes involved in section 2 applications by soldiers for the purchase of private freehold land, while the critics were in fact referring to the operations of the Board in acquiring estate land under the Land for Settlements Act. In the same statement to the House, Guthrie referred to both methods as though they were one, discussing firstly the section 2 procedure of obtaining multiple valuations by 'uninterested' individuals, then introducing an example of the suspect value of local information in the purchase of a large property. He commented:

The property referred to was offered to the Government and the purchase was recommended by local people occupying very important and responsible positions in the district. The local report placing the value upon that property stated that it was worth at least

³¹ Letter from the Undersecretary for Lands to Commissioner, National Efficiency Board/Wellington, 30 August 1917, National Efficiency Board/Wellington file 2/724, NA.

³² Letter from the Wanganui-Waitotara National Efficiency Board of Trustees, to the Commissioner, National Efficiency Board/Wellington, 28 September 1918, National Efficiency Board/Wellington file 2/724, NA.

³³ *NZPD*, 26 November 1918, p.413.

over £8 10s. per acre. The Government bought it at £5 4s. per acre. From that the House can see the value of local information.³⁴

A further example of the confusion even within the Department of Lands and Survey is the Canterbury Commissioner's reply to a request from Brodrick for the names of suitable men to act with the Commissioner in reporting on section 2 applications for land by discharged soldiers. The Commissioner suggested that members of the Land Board do this work because, 'members... complain that properties are bought without reference to their ideas of value or suitability and that afterwards they have to administer them'.³⁵ The Commissioner can only have been speaking of the operations of the Land Purchase Board because the Land Board already contributed to the decisions under section 2 of the 1917 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act.

Guthrie's concern about the Land Purchase Board prompted him to ask Brodrick how to increase its effectiveness. Brodrick suggested increasing the membership of the Board by one member in each Land District and he asked the Commissioners to nominate likely candidates. Brodrick also proposed using section 4 of the Land for Settlements Act 1908 to appoint an unofficial member in each district.

Continued pressure over the perceived delays in providing land for soldier settlement flowed from a number of interest groups. The New Zealand Council of Agriculture passed a resolution at its 1919 conference urging the Government to purchase more land because of the heavy demand from soldiers.³⁶ The RSA and the New Zealand Farmers' Union continued to lecture the Government over its land purchase policy, demanding participation in the land purchase process. However, as Tom Brooking has shown, the statements of the Farmers' Union may

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ Memo from the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Canterbury, to Brodrick, 18 June 1919, L&S file 22/2470, NA. In 1922 a retiring member of the Canterbury Land Board, T. Gee, complained that the problems in Canterbury were not associated with high purchase costs but, rather, poor subdivision by officers of the Department in Wellington, *Quick March*, May 1922, pp.30-31.

³⁶ Minutes of the 1919 annual conference of the New Zealand Council of Agriculture, WTU.

have been made primarily for public consumption as the interests of the members of Farmers' Union were inimical to those of the soldiers. He has observed that 'laissez-faire attitudes and individual self interest in combination prevented the New Zealand Farmers' Union from providing really meaningful help'.³⁷ The RSA wanted recognition of the point that only sympathetic individuals should be involved with issues that affected the soldiers. The Repatriation Department, which tended by the nature of its role to be more sympathetic towards soldiers than the other organs of state, wanted the number of people on the Board increased to deal with the large number of estates under offer to the Government, while 'two or three city men' should be added to the Land Boards to control the activities in relation to urban housing for soldiers.³⁸

However, the pressure from soldiers looking for land and the resulting public outcry were sufficient, particularly in an election year, for the Government to proceed with changes to the Land Purchase Board. In September formal proposals were placed before Guthrie for the establishment of a larger Board under the Land Laws Amendment Act 1919. Local Boards were to consist of the Commissioner of Crown Land and three appointed members who were to have farming experience and a sound knowledge of local values, to possess sound judgement, and to be favourably known in the community. A total of 42 men were appointed to the various local boards.³⁹ Land agents were specifically barred.⁴⁰ J.D. Ritchie, the Land Purchase Controller, was supportive of the enlargement of land purchase operations as the ability of a single Board to inspect properties throughout the country was stretched beyond limits by the number of properties being offered

³⁷ Brooking, 'Agrarian Businessmen Organise', p.384. Brooking observed that individual delegates to the wartime Farmers' Union conferences did express genuine sympathy for the soldiers and a good example are the comments made by a Wairarapa delegate at the 1917 conference. A.P. Whatman advocated, in the absence of voluntary sale by big land owners, the compulsory purchase of improved land for the settlement of recuperating soldiers, *Auckland Weekly News*, 7 June 1917, p.17.

³⁸ Copy of a letter from the Repatriation Department, Christchurch, to the Director of Repatriation, Wellington, 19 June 1919, L&S file 22/2470, NA.

³⁹ *New Zealand Gazette*, 5 February 1920, p.452.

⁴⁰ Memo from Brodrick to Guthrie, 25 September 1919, and Departmental Circular 1484, 21 November 1919, L&S file 22/2470, NA.

under the Land for Settlements Act. The Dominion Board and its local Boards were to begin operation in early 1920 but, as Guthrie observed, 'there was no question about it that it would have been better had they strengthened the Boards earlier in the day'.⁴¹

Table 1 provides a graphic illustration of both the discerning nature of the operations of the Land Purchase Board during the wartime years, and the evidence of the apparent slow pace of land purchase which motivated much of the criticism. The figures for 1920 reveal a substantial increase in both the area purchased and the amount paid, while the number of estates offered to the Crown up to March 1919 reflects the sense of opportunity for profit that the landowning community saw in the soldier settlement scheme.

Table 1. Operations of the Land Purchase Board⁴²

Year to 31 March	Estates Offered	Area Offered	Number Purchased	Area Purchased	Amount Paid £
1914	199	652,883	24	141,327	560,498
1915	137	365,198	18	50,211	356,687
1916	150	277,549	10	15,440	125,522
1917	795	984,788	36	50,140	595,419
1918	499	451,935	37	40,296	440,296
1919	708	714,531	34	37,263	556,810
1920	461*	619,680	94	176,836	1,929,435
1921	204	296,483	48	57,927	843,162
1922	148	137,611	7	5,165	97,887
1923	28	49,535	1	60	1,795

* From this point land was also offered to the local Land Purchase Boards. However final authority rested with the Dominion Board and the figures for purchases are the total number approved.

The extension of the operations of the Land Purchase Board was a response to pressure to achieve the satisfactory settlement of the returned soldiers but, despite this avowed purpose, the soldiers were not given the opportunity of having their

⁴¹ *NZPD*, 6 October 1919, p.84.

⁴² Source: Report of the Land For Settlements Act, *AJHR*, C.5, various years, Table 1.

representatives appointed to either the central Board or local Boards. They could nominate candidates but, as to the question of priority appointment, Guthrie considered 'that class representation on Land [Purchase] Boards was very undesirable as the men were required to represent the interests of New Zealand generally'.⁴³ This was the same answer that Guthrie had given to RSA requests in 1918 for representation on the Land Boards so that the Boards would, according to the RSA, be in a better position to 'estimate the reliability and qualifications of the applicants'.⁴⁴ Guthrie was also foreshadowing a changing attitude towards the soldiers in the official arena and aligning with the Departmental view, namely that the soldiers were not heroes for whom all barriers and safeguards would be lowered. This attitude caused conflict with the RSA, particularly in the period up to 1920, because of the view that the soldiers held of their position within society, and the perceived debt that they considered they were owed by the Government and the community.

The RSA continued its criticisms of the operations of the Land Purchase Board and its regional Boards while the number of soldiers awaiting settlement remained high in the period up to the depression late in 1920. One attack by the RSA on the Canterbury Land Purchase Boards for not fulfilling the role they had been established to carry out, drew a heated reply from the Canterbury Commissioner of Crown Lands:

The members of my Boards [there were two in Canterbury] are all experienced farmers, and one is, in addition, a discharged soldier, who have been specially selected for their business capacity and knowledge of local values.... My Boards will not make a recommendation unless in their opinion the incoming men will have a reasonable chance to make a living and fulfil their obligations in

⁴³ Letter from Guthrie to R.P. Hudson, Member for Motueka, in reply to a concern that the RSA had been promised appointments on the Land Purchase Boards, L&S file 22/2470, NA. The Land Purchase Controller, J.D. Ritchie, noted in his annual report for 1920 that soldiers were to have a representative on each Board, Report of the Land For Settlements Act, 1908, *AJHR*, C.5, 1920, p.1.

⁴⁴ Letter from Guthrie to the General-Secretary, RSA, 4 September 1918, L&S file 26/1-3, NA.

regard to rent and interest. Probably the RSA would be the first to attack us if we did.⁴⁵

More significantly, the Commissioner went on to say that the Boards purchased only 10 per cent of the properties offered to the Government because 'it is only in a minority of cases that the sellers meet us in a moderate spirit'.⁴⁶ This was despite the appointment of local, experienced, practical men to those Boards. The RSA criticism suggests that the issue for the soldiers remained one of speedy settlement and, in this regard, the soldiers were supported by the community.

An example of the operations of the Land Purchase Board, and the contributions made to the procedure by local communities, is provided by the purchase of the Glengarry property near Dannevirke in 1919. In response to a circular letter from Guthrie sent to some of the large landowners in the country,⁴⁷ J. Armstrong offered 2070 acres to the Government at £43 per acre. After inspection by the regional Land Purchase Officer, it was decided by the Board that the price was too high considering the nature of the land, which was described as a light soil with few stump-free areas available for cultivation. There was also a concern that the financial loading on the sections, which the required extensive roading would necessitate, might be prohibitive. The Land Purchase Officer observed that the vendor would probably get his price on the open market. When this information leaked to the community a series of letters flowed to the Commissioner of Crown Lands for Hawkes Bay, the Undersecretary for Lands, and local Members of Parliament, all advocating the purchase of the property for the soldiers. One local farmer with 'practical knowledge' gave a glowing report of the property and stated that similar land in the area was selling from between £35 and £65 per acre. On the suggestion of Brodrick further valuations were undertaken. However, the Commissioner of Crown Lands complained 'I do not know who you will ask to value it - it is a very difficult matter to find a really competent man in

⁴⁵ *Lyttelton Daily Times*, 1 October 1920, clipping on L&S file 22/2470, NA.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ see below for details of circular letter.

Dannevirke - every one seems to be mixed up in land'.⁴⁸ A valuer from Palmerston North eventually valued the property at £39 per acre.

Because of the tense political situation brought on by the public criticisms of the Government's land purchase policy, the influx of returned soldiers, and a looming election, Guthrie was under pressure to acquire Glengarry. The Board recommended the purchase at £38 per acre. Cabinet approved the purchase on 13 October 1919, but the vendor remained unhappy with this amount and withdrew the offer. A month later, and for reasons that are not clear, he again offered the property, for which the Commissioner of Crown Lands suggested £36 per acre. This price was accepted.⁴⁹ The sale gazette notice for the property, appearing to take little cognisance of the earlier report on the condition of the property, described it as first-class land on which the original bush had been cleared and burned, but leaving a good supply of firewood and sufficient timber for posts and battens. The soil was described as generally good and had, where cropped, given good results. The property reportedly carried good grass and was well watered and enjoyed a copious rainfall.⁵⁰

This case is particularly revealing of the influence of local communities in applying pressure for the purchase of specific properties, but the story of the purchase of Glengarry also reveals divisions within the community, and between landed interests and the returned soldiers. Once the property had been acquired, the Commissioner of Crown Lands proposed obtaining local input into the plans for subdivision and roading, although there is no evidence that this occurred. What did happen was that Guthrie, himself under pressure from local parliamentarians, put a great deal of pressure on W.F. Marsh, the Hawkes Bay Commissioner, to open the settlement for ballot prior to the completion of roading. In response, the Commissioner claimed that experience in Hawkes Bay showed the value of

⁴⁸ L&S 21/219, NA.

⁴⁹ Various letters and memos, L&S 21/219, NA. No details on the file reveal why the vendor accepted £2 less per acre than had been offered one month earlier.

⁵⁰ *New Zealand Gazette*, 7 October 1920, p.2829.

opening roads prior to ballot. Where this was not the case, he observed, 'it has been a continual combat between the council, the Public Works Department, and the Land Board ever since'.⁵¹ Lack of Public Works funds for roading delayed the opening of the block for some months but, even prior to the ballot, opposition was rising against the price paid for the land. The Dannevirke branch of the RSA, in registering 'an emphatic protest' over the price paid for the Glengarry estate stated:

This protest is based on the knowledge of experienced members of the association as well as experienced farmers in the district, it being considered that the quality of the land and the improvements necessary does not justify the price paid, viz., £36 per acre.... when these facts are considered ... the cost to the soldier will be most unreasonable and an absolute stumbling block to a man with average capital.⁵²

The Minister gave a curt reply claiming that, 'the block was carefully inspected and valued by competent Valuers before the purchase was made'.⁵³ Prior to the ballot the local RSA branch had counselled soldiers against participating but, despite this advice, 21 soldiers were successful at the ballot for the property held on 24 November 1920.

The issue of the value of the land in the Glengarry block continued to be a point of contention between the Government, the settlers, and local interest groups. Such was the outcry in Dannevirke during the 1921 depression that Guthrie was obliged to attend a meeting of soldier settlers on 23 March 1922.⁵⁴ In introducing the soldiers' grievances to the Minister, the local Member noted that the soldiers were complaining that the value of the rents of the various sections was far too

⁵¹ Memo from the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Napier, to Brodrick, 18 June 1920, L&S file 21/219, NA.

⁵² Letter from H.M. Tansley, Secretary of the Dannevirke RSA, to the General-Secretary, RSA, Wellington, 17 August 1920. This letter was forwarded to the Minister of Lands, L&S file 21/219, NA.

⁵³ Letter from Guthrie to the General-Secretary, RSA, 15 October 1920, L&S file 21/219, NA.

⁵⁴ The following paragraph is based on a long report of the meeting published in the *Dannevirke Evening News*, 23 March 1922, clipping on L&S file 21/219, NA.

high because of the price paid for the section. However, he claimed the soldiers were satisfied that had the prevailing prices of the period when they took up their sections continued they would have been able to 'make a do of it'. He also noted that when the block was opened for selection, land in the vicinity was selling for higher prices than Glengarry.

The soldiers' spokesmen had a somewhat different story to tell. The major problem identified by the soldiers was that the settlement, in 1922 terms, was over-valued by approximately two-thirds, which meant that the soldiers were facing extreme difficulty paying their way. Another soldier representative questioned whether the settlement would have been viable given that prices for produce had remained high and stated that, as things stood, the soldiers would either have to get a revaluation of their properties or walk out. A local farmer referred to the purchase of the property 'as a bad piece of business both by the men who bought it and by the men who went on it' and in his opinion 'the land was far too high'. A representative of the Farmer's Union suggested that a revaluation of the settlement would give the soldiers 'a sporting chance', as the trouble was that the soldiers went on their properties at boom prices.

These comments illustrate the underlying problem of land valuation which had long been a component of the New Zealand free market in land. None of the speakers specifically condemned the local landowners for selling at the ruling inflated prices, or questioned the morality of receiving high prices for land that was destined for soldier settlement. It was accepted by all that the market, as part of the economic fabric, had dictated the value of the land. The soldier applicants had apparently been happy to take a chance, despite the misgivings of the local RSA. It also shows the variation of opinion amongst the 'informed' and 'practical' local farmers who had provided comment for both the purchase process and the subsequent complaints by the soldiers. The community had applied considerable pressure for this property to be purchased yet, when prices dipped, these same people blamed injudicious purchasing policies of the Government and used this as a lever to force the Government's hand into offering a revaluation of the property

at the expense of the Government itself, and not of the soldiers or the original vendor.⁵⁵

Equally indicative of the nature of the local pressure for land purchase is a case in early 1919 where the Land Purchase Board decided not to purchase an estate in the Wanganui area. According to the Board, the property would not sub-divide well for the soldier settlers. This provoked an angry reaction from interest groups in the area. 'Experienced farmers' and 'expert advisors' assisting the Wanganui-Waitotara Patriotic Association claimed that the property was perfectly suited to the needs of returned soldiers.⁵⁶ The skills of the Land Purchase Board were questioned and it was observed in a local newspaper that 'as the matter is of great importance... to the community generally a demand was made [by the Patriotic Association] for the Minister to personally inspect the property'.⁵⁷ The tenor of the newspaper's claims are interesting in that Guthrie is presented as the champion of the soldiers with their best interests at heart. He was also described as a practical farmer, as opposed to the 'experts' of the Department of Lands. The paper also cited the *Auckland Star*, which claimed that the staff of the Department of Lands and Survey were

elderly gentlemen whose years of association with red tape and stilted routine have deprived them of initiative and enterprise, and left them with an extravagant regard for the sanctity of rules and regulations. The members of the Land Purchase Board, cautious and conscientious to a fault - if that were possible - are the worst offenders of all in this respect....What is wanted, in the opinion of practical people with a knowledge of the facts, is a new

⁵⁵ The Report of the Hawkes Bay Enquiry Board tabled in the House in July 1923 (see chapter 12 below) noted: 'The great controversial subject in and around Dannevirke is the price paid for Glengarry, one section arguing it is too dear, another that it is fair, and another that is unsuitable and never should have been bought at all. We went to a deal of trouble interviewing leading men to get all these shades of opinion.... Having been over every section on it carefully, we cannot say that we think it is too dear, with exception perhaps of one section', Soldier Settlement, Summaries of Reports of Enquiry Boards, *AJHR*, C.9a, Part A, 1923, p.8.

⁵⁶ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 11 March 1919, clipping on L&S file 26/1-4, NA.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

department... administered with the single purpose of promoting the best interests of the soldier and the State.⁵⁸

It must be asked how the best interests of the soldiers were arrived at in this particular scenario? The claim by the reporter suggests that the Board was being criticised in the press for being 'too' preoccupied with protecting the interests of the State and the soldiers, and that people wishing to sell at prices 'beneficial' to the soldier settlers were looking to the open market where, it was suggested, they found ready sales without the delays or refusals experienced with the Board. This suggests the Government was purchasing at less than market values.

There were numerous complaints that the quality of the land purchased by the Board was inferior worn-out country that land-owners were only too glad to be rid of at the expense of the soldier settlers. There is evidence that some of the estates purchased were in poor condition when taken up by the soldiers.⁵⁹ The matter is complicated by the lack of specific detail on particular tracts of land. The Department of Lands and Survey often let grazing rights on estates prior to ballot to stop pasture deterioration through under-utilisation. The land at the time of purchase or ballot may have had worn-out pastures which required resowing and fertilising, but individual studies would be required to determine the extent of this.⁶⁰

The Department had been concerned that many of the section 2 freehold properties taken up by soldiers as going concerns were in fact worn out and required extensive inputs to bring them back into effective production.⁶¹ Some blame for this must rest with the Land Boards as being responsible for making recommendations and the valuers who advised them on the merits of the section 2

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ For example Fairfield settlement near Feilding, Te Whiti settlement in Wairarapa, and Te Miro settlement near Cambridge.

⁶⁰ Studies such as Perry's *Soldiers Of The Mangateparu*, are very useful for establishing the changing perceptions of land quality on particular soldier settlement blocks.

⁶¹ Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1921, p.6.

properties. The arrival of the 1921 depression dampened the demand from soldiers for land settlement and, as an officer of the Department recently observed, 'all the glamour went out of the land'.⁶²

The complaints by the soldiers and their supporters about the quality of the land also reflected the psychological dimension that the soldiers carried from their war experience. It rankled that good land was not readily available. The following verse appeared on the cover of *Quick March* in October 1919 and expressed the exasperation felt by soldiers over delays and inequalities that they perceived in the land settlement scheme:

He travelled far,
Through thorn and sand
And glimpsed at last
The Promised Land

He looked and went;
Nine hundred others
Marched back, a landless
Band of brothers

Broad acres lay
On either hand;
Yet still they sought
The Promised Land⁶³

Without case studies of every property offered, the consistency of decisions made by the Board cannot be tested. Guthrie was moved to observe in the House that he 'was quite well aware that the effect of the Government going on to the market was to raise land-values; but the Government was not alone responsible for those high values.... The high prices ruling for dairy-produce had everything to do with it'.⁶⁴

⁶² Personal interview with Mr Frank Jamieson, returned soldier and former public servant of the Department of Lands and Survey in the Wellington district office during the 1920s, October 1990.

⁶³ The reference is to the ballot of the sixty sections on the Mangateparu block, near Morrinsville in 1919.

⁶⁴ *NZPD*, 6 October 1919, p.83.

In terms of the contribution of the Board to the ensuing land boom, the evidence is inconclusive. Nor is Sir James Allen's claim that the Department of Lands was, in response to the pressures of the soldiers, indiscriminately buying land, substantiated from this evidence.

The use of Belshaw's often quoted observation that approximately half the total occupied area of the country changed hands during the period 1915-24 requires reassessment in the context of the Government's contribution to the land boom. Between April 1915 and March 1924, some 270 estates, with a combined area of approximately 383,127 acres, were purchased under the Land for Settlements Act for redistribution to soldiers, primarily on leasehold or right of purchase tenures.⁶⁵ The major government contribution to the increase in freehold land transfer was under section 2 of the 1917 Amendment Act. Table 2 indicates that, as a percentage of all freehold transactions, section 2 was most influential during the 1919-1920 year, when demand for land from soldiers was high. Taken overall for the period April 1919 to 31 March, 1922, during the height of the land boom, the Government's land purchase policy for soldier settlement contributed to approximately 7.3 per cent of the freehold transfers. This does not include Native Lands which were purchased and subsequently declared Crown Land.

Table 2. Land Transaction Comparisons⁶⁶

Year to March	Total Rural freehold transfers	Section 2 sales	Crown's purchase of estates	% of Crown Involvement
1919	9,559	263 (186)	34	2.3
1920	16,784	4107(2915)	94	17.9
1921	18,299	961 (682)	48	3.9
1922	10,525	112 (79)	7	0.8

⁶⁵ See Table I above.

⁶⁶ The total transfer figures are taken from Belshaw et al. *Agricultural Organisation*, p.186. The section 2 figures are from the Report of Discharged Soldier Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9. The figures for Crown purchases are from the Report of the Land For Settlements Act, *AJHR*, C.5, Table I, various years.

The section 2 figures also contain 1,105 Crown Lease purchases and 496 advances to pay off existing mortgages.⁶⁷ The figure shown in brackets has these 1,602 transactions removed as an equal annual percentage from the section 2 sales. Section 3 purchases under the 1917 Amendment Act amounted to 122 properties purchased for 327 soldiers, 56,285 acres in area and costing the Government £1,085,042.⁶⁸ These figures support contemporary complaints that the Board appeared slow and ineffective in its operations, but they make a mockery of the claims by later writers that the Crown entered into a phase of indiscriminate buying after the armistice. What contemporaries and later writers describe as Crown purchases were in fact private transactions under section 2 of the 1917 Act.

The methodology used by George, in which the boom-period purchase prices of these estates are given and then compared with late-depression values, provides superficial evidence of injudicious purchasing. However, it is not useful in understanding the motivations and imperatives operating at the time, nor does it allow for the fact that the value of the land began to increase during the late 1930s.⁶⁹

Although overall government policy was concerned with the quick re-assimilation of the soldiers, speed in the process of land purchase was contrary to the Department's brief during the land boom. This was to buy land at the cheapest rates for the benefit of both the soldiers and the State. Allowing for the dominance

⁶⁷ *Press*, 27 February 1922, p.6.

⁶⁸ An indication of the 'sympathetic' operations of the Wellington Board may be drawn from the greater number of single farms which were purchased for soldiers under section 3 of the 1917 amendment act, as compared to other Land Districts. The result of this was to provide a greater measure of 'protection' to the settler than that available to section 2 settlers. However, this might also be seen as providing protection for the State's investment while guiding the farming activities of the soldier settlers through the hands-on advice of the Soldier Settlement Supervisors and Crown Land Rangers.

⁶⁹ George, 'The Depression of 1921-22 in New Zealand'. The New Zealand Labour party also resorted to this tactic in its 1941 pamphlet, *Farms for Soldiers Sailors and Airmen: Defenders of Democracy*, prepared for the cancelled 1941 election.

of the market and the unwillingness of the Reform Government to indulge in direct intervention, alternative strategies had to be found.

CHAPTER 8

APPEALS TO PATRIOTISM

In the early rhetoric over the issue of land settlement for soldiers the large landowners quickly became the target for those elements of the community still seeking to break up the larger estates through compulsory purchase. However, the proponents of 'bursting up' now held the higher moral ground because the recipients of the benefits of their endeavour were to be the soldiers who had defended the nation and done so much to establish a sense of national identity and pride. The *Evening Post*, in supporting the compulsory purchase of land, claimed:

landowners generally may be assured that what is not done voluntarily will sooner or later be forced upon them legislatively. The alternative, "volunteer or be compelled", does not apply alone to the soldier material in the streets of Wellington. It overhangs the owner of every big estate that is improvable and does not produce to its capacity a new potential settler with special claims [has] come along.¹

Both Massey and Guthrie toyed with the idea of compulsory purchase of private land. However, in practice they preferred to use the threat of compulsion to encourage landowners to sell at reasonable prices. During the debate of the 1916 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act Massey had noted that blocks of good land were not plentiful and he called upon members to furnish him with details of blocks in their districts which might be suitable for soldiers.² He was not contemplating compulsory purchase but intended sending Ritchie to inspect the properties with the idea of appealing to the patriotism of the landowner.³

¹ *Evening Post*, 19 February 1916, clipping on L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

² *NZPD*, 14 June 1916, p.847.

³ The Finance Act passed in the same session had also included a clause giving the Government power, in cases of compulsory purchase of land, to insist on payment in war debentures bearing interest up to 5 per cent.

The on-going difficulty of acquiring suitable land at reasonable prices forced Sir Francis Bell, the Acting Minister of Lands during Massey's absences, to make a general appeal early in October 1916 to large landowners to sell parts of their properties. Bell claimed that 'good land in fairly large areas, divisible into a reasonable number of holdings can only be secured by general consent of the owners of large estates'.⁴ The alternative was, as Bell saw it, to enter in to the compulsory acquisition of several large estates. This would limit settlement to just a few districts, rather than being spread throughout the country, and present the prospect of securing areas within the purchased estates which could not be easily subdivided. The appeal by Bell appeared to fall on deaf ears. The *Wairarapa Age* reported that not a single response had been heard of, although 'third rate properties are being offered to the Government at double their value', and that 'unless the owners of large estates voluntarily sub-divide, the Government will be compelled to adopt measures of a drastic character'.⁵ Bell wrote a minute to Brodrick on the *Wairarapa Age* clipping stating that he agreed with the writer.⁶

As a consequence of the difficulty of purchasing private land the Government turned towards the policy, enshrined in sections 2 and 3 of the 1917 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act, of allowing the soldiers to individually purchase their own properties. However the Crown continued to press the owners of larger properties. On a visit to Gisborne in 1918 the Minister of Agriculture, W.D.S. MacDonald, was met by a deputation of local interest groups urging the establishment of soldier settlements in the district. MacDonald claimed to possess a list of 150 farmers in the area who owned between 3000 and 40,000 acres, some of whom he 'expected' to hand over land for soldier settlement.⁷ The threat of the alternative, compulsory purchase, was implicit. However, the machinery available in the existing law for compulsory purchase was considered by Massey to be

⁴ *Evening Post*, 9 October 1916, clipping on L&S file 26/1-2, NA.

⁵ *Wairarapa Age*, 27 October 1916, clipping on L&S file 26/1-2, NA.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *Liberator*, 15 October 1918, p.4.

unworkable, despite being written into the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act, 1916.⁸

There appears to have been little response from large landowners, despite an earlier example reported in the *Evening Post* of three Gisborne sheep farmers who had purchased a property of 3,700 acres at Te Araroa, valued at £45,000, which they intended to lease to 12 soldier settlers. The rent from the property was intended for the wounded soldiers' fund.⁹ Patriotic fervour no doubt contributed to both this offer and the publicity it received, but it was reported in the four-year period up to August 1920 only four other large landowners privately subdivided their holdings for the settlement of soldiers.¹⁰ The Commissioner of Crown Lands for Hawkes Bay reported that, apart from the Te Araroa case, there were one or two cases he had heard about where landowners were 'doing something' for the soldiers and he mentioned H. Guthrie-Smith of Tutira, and General Sir Andrew Russell. Most significantly he reported on Sir George Hunter's absolute gift of 2,275 acres of land near Porangahau for the settlement of five soldiers.¹¹

⁸ Brodrick was an ardent critic of compulsion, experienced as he was with the long drawn-out Flaxbourne purchase in Marlborough between 1903 and 1905, which was characterised by long court sittings, problems of valuations, and counter claims by the Clifford family who held the property.

⁹ This expression of largesse was intended only for soldiers of the Waiapu district. *Evening Post*, 19 February 1916, clipping on L&S file 26/1-1, NA. *Auckland Weekly News*, 21 June 1917, reported that Mr G.P. Donnelly of Taradale had given stock and material to the value of £12,600 to the soldier settlers on the Kaiwaka settlement north of Napier.

¹⁰ Memo from Brodrick to Guthrie, 3 August 1920, L&S file 21/149, NA. This unimpressive display was further devalued when it was noted by Brodrick that the return included the Wairarapa training farm, the above-mentioned Gisborne case, and a Nelson example where the owner put his sons on the property. This return from various Commissioners cannot be considered completely accurate as an earlier report for the Wellington Land District mentioned the initiative of a landowner near Hunterville who purchased a farm and subdivided it for four soldiers, *ibid.*, 24 May 1920.

¹¹ Hunter was the Reform MP for Waipawa and President of the New Zealand Council of Agriculture. Although he publicly supported the efforts of the government to settle soldiers on the land, he was also an advocate of the colony-type settlement on unimproved land under the direction of competent supervisors. In his address to the 1920 conference of the Council he suggested that a slower method of settlement than that being practised would ensure that none of the soldiers would miss out. Minutes of the Conference of the New Zealand Council of Agriculture, 7 July 1920, WTU.

In early 1919, with mass demobilisation under way, Guthrie decided that a direct appeal would be made to landowners in areas where the Government was having difficulty providing land for discharged soldiers. During May 1919 a circular was prepared for distribution to landowners in the Poverty Bay district and, although no record remains of its effectiveness, Brodrick subsequently requested that the Commissioners of Crown Land ascertain which of the larger landowners in each Land District would be amenable to the sale of some of their holdings. These men were then to receive a personal appeal from the Minister of Lands:

As you are aware, there is a widespread demand for land from our returned soldiers, and for some time past the Land Purchase Board has been endeavouring to secure blocks of suitable land in your district that can be subdivided with advantage for settlement by discharged soldiers. As you may not have had the matter brought before you personally, I am now communicating with you in order that you may submit an offer of such of your property as is suitable for soldier settlement, and that the Land Purchase Board may deal with the matter at the earliest opportunity. I may add that some action in this respect must be taken to facilitate the settlement of our discharged soldiers.¹²

Five hundred copies of the letter were printed, and those who replied were generally co-operative and showed a willingness to discuss the merits, or otherwise, of their particular properties. A Hastings land agent indicated that some of his clients were predisposed to help the Government, but were concerned that to ask for pieces of land for soldiers would be used as a precedent to later obtain more land for civilian settlement. He requested an assurance from the Minister that this was a once-only request.¹³

In general Guthrie was satisfied with the response to the appeal and, in discussion with Sir George Hunter, proposed that the leading landowners in each district should call meetings to discuss the matter. Guthrie advocated the policy of the large owners getting together and offering just one or two large estates in each

¹² Draft of circular prepared for Guthrie, L&S file 21/149, NA.

¹³ Letter to Guthrie from a Hawkes Bay land agent, 13 August 1919, L&S file 21/149, NA.

district rather than numerous small holdings. He rejected Sir George's suggestion that a deputation of landowners should fix the percentage of each estate to be offered.¹⁴ The need for such an appeal reflects not only the pressure on the Government but also the powerlessness of a government *vis-à-vis* large landowners when it was unwilling to indulge in compulsory purchase or restrictive taxation. In terms of numbers the larger landowners did not wield much influence in the polling booth, but it does appear that the Government was ideologically unwilling to indulge in compulsory purchase, quite apart from the existing administrative impediments, and the need to maintain financial support for the Reform Party from some larger landowners.

Provision of adequate land for soldier settlement proved a difficult undertaking for the Government and highlighted the absence of suitable reserves and the dangers, both political and financial, of instituting private land re-purchasing policies. As opposed to claims in the historical literature, the Government appears to have exercised discriminatory land-buying practices and did attempt to limit the prices paid by individual soldiers under section 2. It had little alternative in the face of its unwillingness to indulge in any form of compulsory purchase or arbitrary land-value fixing. Alternative schemes presented by various interest groups were based either on politically unacceptable criteria such as forced sales, or on the fiction that there were substantial areas of quality land still to be opened up. The agricultural and pastoral frontiers had, with a few exceptions, reached the limits of practical expansion and closer settlement appeared the only alternative for increasing the number of farmers. The Government was under sustained pressure to deal equitably with the soldiers and at the same time remain loyal to its *laissez-faire* notions of the rights of freeholders. The free market actually acted as a governing mechanism restricting the number of soldiers applying for land. Had notions of free grants or compulsory purchase of private land at pre-war prices been pursued,

¹⁴ Letter from Guthrie to Sir George Hunter, 18 August 1919, L&S 21/149, NA.

even within practical financial and political limits, a far larger number of soldiers might have requested assistance, further creating unrest and disappointment.¹⁵

¹⁵ Massey had written to Guthrie informing him of the RSA's concern that so many soldiers were being disappointed at ballots for land, memo from Massey to Guthrie, 8 December 1919, L&S file 26/1-5, NA.

RETURN HOME

This section highlights the fundamental conflict between the two roles ascribed to the regional Land Boards to prudently safeguard the Crown's investment in land settlement and, at the same time reward the nation's soldiers. Despite these conflicting pressures, the desire of the Government and the community for quick settlement of soldiers placed a heavy burden upon the staff of the Department of Lands and Survey and the regional Land Boards. The traditional machinery of land settlement was perceived by contemporary interest groups to be slow and cumbersome when faced with the demands for speedy settlement of returning soldiers. This led to the adoption by government of financial policies that allowed soldiers with little capital to begin farming but, at the end of the day, left them financially dependent upon the Crown. The paternalism directed by the community towards the soldier settlers, which motivated the authorities during the early period of settlement, remained a central component of the soldiers' treatment by the authorities, but it will be shown that this took on regional variation.

The Department of Lands was generally sympathetic to the demands of the soldiers but the delivery of services and advice suffered through a lack of systems, resources and staff. The process of land settlement passed through three identifiable phases which related to the changing demand for land by the soldiers, the condition of the State's finances, and the state of the agricultural commodities markets. As a response to the demands being voiced in society for the quick settlement of soldiers upon the land, the scheme was remarkably successful. The soldiers' view of the settlement phase, as represented in press commentaries and an official inquiry, concentrated on the problems that faced the new settlers. Central to the popular view of the soldier settlement scheme is the notion that the soldiers were placed on bushland sections in the more remote parts of the country and

essentially left to fend for themselves.¹ This fails to account for the diversity of land types and the national aspect of the scheme, and obscures the importance of supervision and support of the officials of the Department of Lands.²

¹ Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere: Cumberland, Landmarks*.

² Chapter 11 will review the supervision mechanisms and place these within the context of the prevailing work ethic of economic individualism on which the scheme was promulgated, and the subsequent development of dependency in the relationship between the soldiers and the authorities.

CHAPTER 9

MEANS AND ENDS: SETTLEMENT PROCESSES

The soldiers' had taken risks at the front and it was only right that risks should be taken in settling them on the land.¹

This chapter outlines the processes and procedures of settlement and focuses upon the critical role of the regional Land Boards which were the interface between the soldier and the Department of Lands in the allotment process. The Boards' role in the provision of land under section 2 of the 1917 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act has been noted previously, but this will be further amplified here. It will be argued that the settlement scheme embarked upon by the Government in late 1915 was indeed a risky one, beyond the simple cost-accounting terms that later writers have suggested. However, the settlement procedures followed in the case of the soldiers were not new, the underlying ethos being that access to the land gave the individual a chance to 'make good'. The soldiers were not being guaranteed success, nor even a comfortable living, but rather the opportunity to try out their possible affinity for the farming life.² Claims by later writers that many of the soldier settlers lacked capital and previous experience are not disputed here but, in terms of a balanced view of the scheme, the reasons why more prudent land settlement safeguards were neglected requires investigation. Nineteenth-century pioneering attitudes towards the processes of land settlement remained central to the actions of the Land Boards.

The eleven Land Boards met monthly in the main city or town of their respective regions. This division of responsibility was inherited from the provincial period and was considered the most efficient way of supervising land settlement over the

¹ Proceedings of the RSA conference as reported in the *Liberator*, 15 January 1920, p.3.

² The imagery of the statement 'a chance to make good' is revealing of the dominating ethos of economic individualism underpinning rural land settlement.

diverse range of land and climatic conditions found in New Zealand. Four local men, three appointed and one elected, all supposedly familiar with local conditions, made up each Board. The operations of the various Boards were not substantially altered by the introduction of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act in 1915. The original scheme treated the soldiers in much the same way as any potential Crown tenants,³ the exception being the availability of development finance by way of current account advance.⁴ As the agencies for land distribution to the returning soldiers, however, the Land Boards were under intense pressure and there was a constant tension between the Land Boards and the desires of the soldiers, the public, and the politicians for the provision of the reward of access to the land. Despite the Boards' semi-autonomous nature, both the Minister of Lands and the Undersecretary expected each Commissioner and Land Board to consistently enact government policy, to protect the State's investment, to act with a mixture of paternalistic benevolence and authority toward the soldier settlers and, in some less quantifiable way, to ensure that the natural land resources of the country were developed and exploited in an efficient and socially responsible manner. These were heavy demands upon part-time elected and appointed officials, especially when the political needs of the Government were at odds with common-sense administration of the land laws.

To be considered for an allotment of Crown Land, soldiers had to present themselves at the monthly meeting of the Board when the ballot of a block in which they had an interest was to be held.⁵ Applicants were examined as to their

³ McKenzie, the retiring Undersecretary, had informed Commissioners during the planning phase in 1915 that 'only applicants likely to be successful as farmers should be granted any special preference', Circular, 4 August 1915, L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

⁴ There was a precedent for this in the Small Farms and Village Settlement Scheme of the 1880s. Michael Spedding, 'John Ballance's Village Homestead Special Settlement Scheme, 1886', BA(Hons) Research Exercise in History, Massey University, 1991.

⁵ The settlement scheme was intended to provide the soldiers with exclusive access to land proclaimed for settlement under sections 3 and 4 of the 1915 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act. However, soldiers could also apply for land under normal ballot conditions, and they were given greater preference than civilian applicants. The Boards also had the option of allotting Crown land to deserving soldiers without competition. The Boards were also responsible for making recommendations under Section 2 and 3 of the 1917 Discharged Soldier's Settlement Amendment Act 1917.

previous experience and general capacity, state of health, and the amount of capital they could command. The Board also required evidence that soldiers were of good character, a condition that could be met by soldiers' army discharge papers, although in the first months of operation of the scheme Brodrick was concerned that the discharge forms did not show whether soldiers had been discharged for misconduct.⁶ Section 2 of the 1915 Act specifically excluded soldiers in this category, which had interesting connotations for the period after the armistice when a large number of soldiers with venereal infections, an offence under Army discipline, returned to New Zealand.⁷

As the scheme increased in scope, the Land Boards came under increasing pressure to hold ballots for larger settlements in the nearest town to the settlement, rather than in the Boards' administrative centres. The RSA was particularly vocal on this point claiming, for example, that the soldiers were not in a position to be able to go to Auckland for each ballot of land in the King Country or the Bay of Plenty. In the case of the ballot for the Hukutaia settlement at Opotiki, Guthrie over-ruled the objections of the Commissioner and directed that a member of the Board go to Opotiki to examine applicants prior to the ballot.⁸ This policy assuaged some of the complaints from local interest groups regarding the problems of settlement for local soldiers in their home areas. The RSA further lobbied for the procedure to be modified so that applicants could be examined by any Land Board.

The Boards operated independently under the chairmanship of the District Commissioner of Crown Land, and regional variation in the provision and administration of land for soldiers was commented on at the earliest stage by

⁶ Circular from Brodrick to all Commissioners of Crown Land, 13 June 1916, L&S file 26/1-1, NA. In April 1916, Brodrick had made enquiries through the Discharged Soldiers' Information Department about an applicant for land in both the Auckland and Hawkes Bay Land Districts. He got back detailed information from which he deduced that the soldier was 'satisfactory and bears a good character', L&S file 26/88, NA.

⁷ Jane Tolerton has noted that some 16,000 New Zealand troops contracted venereal disease. See Jane Tolerton, *Ettie: A Life of Ettie Rout*, Auckland, 1992, pp.195-197.

⁸ L&S file 21/133, NA.

contemporaries. This variation appears to have been dependent primarily upon the personal attitudes of the Commissioners, rather than the Boards. This became manifest in several ways, from the degree of impediments placed in the way of access, such as the amount of capital required, and the degree of required previous experience, to the working of the legislation around sections 2 and 3 of the 1917 Amendment Act. By the nature of the assistance available under the various pieces of legislation, soldier Crown tenants were placed in a position of subservience to the Commissioner and the Board and the degree of sympathy shown by the Boards towards problems facing the soldiers varied from region to region. The examination of applicants by a local Board for land outside of its district also revealed variations in attitude. Some soldiers were passed by their local Board as suitable but then subsequently refused access to distant ballots by other Boards. The RSA executive lobbied for a ruling from Brodrick that the Board in whose district the land was located was the sole arbiter of eligibility although the examination process could be carried out in any district.⁹

The Boards also jealously protected their independence from outside intervention. On two occasions members of the Wellington Board objected to a proposed diminution of their power to examine soldier applicants.¹⁰ In May 1919, for example, after Brodrick had floated a suggestion from the RSA that local Repatriation Boards examine and pass applicants for land under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act,¹¹ the Wellington Land Board reaffirmed the principle that as the whole of the responsibility for the settlement of soldiers rested with the Land Board, it could not delegate any of its powers. It added: 'experience already gained by the members of the Board has proved conclusively it is imperative that the examination of all applicants be carried out either by the Land Board or the

⁹ *Quick March*, October 1920, p.49.

¹⁰ During the last week of April, 1919, the Commissioners held a Conference in Wellington to discuss the problems of land settlement in general, and of soldiers in particular. *The New Zealand Herald*, 5 May 1919, p.6, reported: 'The Commissioners agreed that the discussions would bring about more uniformity'.

¹¹ It is likely that the RSA saw the local Repatriation Boards as being more sympathetic to the needs of the soldiers and less bound by red tape.

individual members of that body'.¹² When the matter was reconsidered a month later at Brodrick's request, the Board members unanimously reaffirmed their position because:

they were of the opinion that the personnel of the Rehabilitation Boards would not be drastic enough in the examination of the applicants as the personal element would be introduced - because of the amounts of [money] involved this could jeopardise the scheme.¹³

In October 1920 Brodrick proposed appointing a central advisory board to review applications for loans under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act after these had been considered by the various Land Boards. The Wellington Board considered this to be a vote of censure upon itself and suggested: 'If the Advisory Board is a necessity would it not be preferable for them to deal with applications before coming to the Land Board'.¹⁴

Various interest groups saw a role for themselves on the Land Boards and, as was the case with the Land Purchase Board, the implication to be drawn from this was that the Land Boards were seen as being incapable of adequately carrying out the task of soldier settlement. The reasons for the RSA and the National Efficiency Board seeking some representation on the Boards were diametrically opposed. The National Efficiency Board believed that some of the soldiers were not suited to a farming life because of their experience at the front, 'knocking about in the way some of the soldiers have done. This unfits them for the close application that is necessary to make a successful farmer'.¹⁵ The National Efficiency Board was advocating exclusion of certain men, while the RSA variously wanted complete

¹² Wellington Land Board minutes, L&S-W 12/18, NA.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Wellington Land Board minutes, L&S-W 12/20, NA. Material on the eventual role of this advisory board appears not to have survived although Brodrick refers to it in a diary entry on 26 August 1921 when he noted he had 'been very busy putting into order the recommendations of the advisory board for soldier advances which got somewhat out of order during my illness'.

¹⁵ Letter from the Wellington Commissioner of the National Efficiency Board to the Secretary, Otaki Board of Trustees, 8 May 1918, NEB-W 2/724, NA.

control of the settlement scheme through the agency of its Land Committee, or to have its nominees on the existing Land Boards or, to have Boards appointed in each district to deal only with issues relating to soldier settlement.¹⁶ In January 1919, the RSA executive stated that 'such nominees need not be a returned soldier but must be someone competent to act in the returned soldiers' interest'.¹⁷ The demands of the soldiers are evidence that the Land Boards were perceived by the soldiers as being insufficiently generous, and that soldiers sought privileges not accorded to other Crown Land applicants.¹⁸ Brodrick rejected a later RSA claim for representation because it would introduce class interests on to the Land Boards yet, despite his view, the scheme was actually based on the notion of specific class interest.¹⁹

From the outset of the soldier settlement scheme it became obvious that the various Commissioners of Crown Lands interpreted the meaning of the Act and their Boards' roles differently, and this may have been influenced by the type of holdings prevalent in each land district. For the purposes of this study the Wellington and Hawkes Bay Boards will be used as examples.

W.F. Marsh, the Commissioner for the Hawkes Bay Land District from May 1916 until 1923, emerges from the record as a pragmatic realist who, unlike some

¹⁶ This was part of the proposed political platform put forward by the Auckland Provincial Committee of the RSA in 1919, *New Zealand Stock and Station Journal*, 1 September 1919, p.1230.

¹⁷ RSA executive committee minutes, book 3, p.19, RSA Headquarters, Wellington.

¹⁸ An exception was provided by the Invercargill Branch of the RSA, which claimed that the soldiers could not justly claim representation because of their limited numbers in comparison to other Crown tenants. RSA executive committee minutes, book 1, 11 March 1918, p.146, RSA Headquarters, Wellington.

¹⁹ Memo from Brodrick to the Minister of Lands, 17 May 1920, L&S file 26/1-7, NA. An alternative is to see the processes of access to the land in terms of a class differentiation while subsequent administration was to be on the level playing field principle. This provides support for Wootton's claim that, over time, the actions of the veterans' organisations moved through from radical global demands to less adversarial specific claims as soldiers became progressively reintegrated back into society. During the early phase of repatriation, the soldiers represented an autonomous group within society with strongly held beliefs regarding their deservedness for special treatment and privileges. National actions and calls upon the Government were the form protests took. Later more specific and localised concerns characterised the intervention of the RSA. See Graham Wootton, *The Politics of Influence: British Ex-Servicemen, Cabinet Decisions, and Cultural Change (1917-57)*, London, 1963, pp.184-194.

politicians and community groups, harboured no idealistic expectations as to the ability of the soldiers to make successful settlers. In October 1918 he observed:

some of the settlers will fail... despite the argument of would-be critics that because men representing all walks and grades in life may, after a few months training at Trentham and Sling camp, be turned into the finest fighting force in the world, evolution of these men into tillers of the soil is a natural corollary. The bayonet and the ploughshare is a sweet little belief, but experience is showing that only a small percentage of returned men who were not engaged in farm or sheep work before their enlistment are particularly anxious to go on the land.... These remarks owe their expression to the constant re-iteration of the outside statement that soldiers may be readily fashioned into farmers.²⁰

This can be contrasted with a statement by G.H.M. McClure, the Wellington Commissioner, albeit during the jingoistic heights of 1916, when he claimed: 'In my opinion every discharged soldier ought to be very liberally treated. Every fighter desirous of land should be given a section, to the exclusion of the man who can fight but stays at home'.²¹ The Wellington Land Board had decided at an early stage that the crucial factor in whether a soldier should be considered for settlement was not possession of capital or experience but, rather, the status of the applicant's military service.²² The attitudes expressed by the two Commissioners highlight the approaches of their respective Land Boards towards the soldiers as both applicants and subsequently as Crown tenants.

The Wellington Board and McClure gained a reputation for liberal treatment. One newspaper columnist was very enthusiastic about the efforts of McClure to settle soldiers in the Wellington Land District and wrote: 'The law is being interpreted strictly... but it is being interpreted sympathetically, and without the least intrusion

²⁰ Memo from Commissioner of Crown Lands, Hawkes Bay to Brodrick, 7 October 1918, L&S file 26/1-4, NA.

²¹ *Auckland Star*, 1 February 1916, report of comments made by McClure, clipping on L&S file 22/635/14, NA. McClure resigned from the Department in 1922 and contested a seat in the election of that year for the Liberal-Labour Party and, according to the Acting Minister of Lands, used his expert knowledge for political purposes. *NZPD*, 8 August 1923, p.654.

²² *Evening Post*, 13 February 1916, clipping on L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

of red tape, with the result that any soldier who can satisfy the Commissioner of his bona fides... finds his way made easy. Even a man practically without money can acquire a section'.²³ By comparison Marsh and the Hawkes Bay Board were accused of dealing with the soldiers in an autocratic and unsympathetic manner. J. Payne, the Social Democrat Member for Grey Lynn, claimed during the Repatriation Bill debate that the Wellington Board was very liberal and placed no bar in the way of the soldier settler even if he had no money. He claimed, however, that the Hawkes Bay Board required the settler to have between £300 and £500 capital.²⁴ In September 1918 the Hastings Borough Council passed a resolution criticising Marsh for the way in which he was handling the local settlement of soldiers because he 'gives no opportunity to men with knowledge of farming to take up even 10 acres unless they have a good bank balance'.²⁵ On 3 June 1917, J.T.M. Hornsby, Liberal Member for Wairarapa wrote to the Attorney-General, A.L. Herdman, complaining that two soldiers 'both of good heart' had been told by Marsh that unless they had £1000 in capital they could not go into the ballot for land at Porangahau. Hornsby sent them to see McClure about land in the Rangitikei.²⁶

²³ *Weekly Press*, 11 April 1917, clipping on L&S file 26/1-4, NA.

²⁴ *NZPD*, 4 December, 1918.

²⁵ Letter from Hawkes Bay Borough Council to Guthrie, L&S file 26/1-4, NA.

²⁶ L&S file 13/25-6, NA. The Hastings War Relief Association decided that the successful applicants for the Porangahau ballot would be eligible for advances of up to £250 when they had exhausted the Government advance of £500. *Hawkes Bay Tribune*, 5 June 1917, clipping on L&S file 26/1-2, NA.

Table 3. Capital Possessed by Soldier Applicants to March 1919²⁷

Land District ²⁸	Total Settlers	Nil	Under£50	£50-£100	£100-£500	£500+
Wellington	(317)	79	46	82	96	14
Hawkes Bay	(127)	7	-	32	58	30

Figures in Table 3 reveal the different approaches of the two Land Boards and also the likely types of land the respective Boards dealt with. Approximately 69 per cent of the Hawkes Bay settlers, but only 34 per cent of Wellington settlers, had more than £100 of capital. The Undersecretary explained that the policy for those men with little or no capital was to settle them on small dairy farms from which they could obtain a quick financial return. The right of the Land Boards to decline applications from soldiers for land not commensurate with their capital resources was also defended by Brodrick in terms of efficiency.²⁹

Marsh was consistent in his demand that the soldier applicants for Hawkes Bay sheep country have substantial backing. His proposals for the Ardkeen settlement near Wairoa indicate both the character of the man and the political pressure for closer settlement. The land was purchased in mid-1919 for £11.10 per acre. Marsh was of the opinion that the 10,600 acres of high-priced grazing land did not lend itself to subdivision in the ordinary manner and so presented Brodrick with two plans. The first called for subdivision into thirteen holdings from 620 acres to 1253 acres. Marsh reflected: 'Could we be stiff-necked enough to earmark this settlement for the class of men with capital who are being forced into the open freehold market because of the lack of lands they are looking for'.³⁰ He

²⁷ Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1919, p.4. Miles Fairburn has suggested that the Wellington figures indicate that the men without capital were blue collar workers, Fairburn, 'Why Did the New Zealand Labour Party Fail to Win Office Until 1935', *Political Science*, 37(2), 1985, p.120.

²⁸ The figures for Hawkes Bay were only given as 32 below £100.

²⁹ Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1919, p.4.

³⁰ Memo from Marsh to Brodrick, 7 November 1919, L&S file 21/172, NA.

suggested the settlement be reserved as an officers' block with a minimum capital of £2000 per man but, he noted, 'this idea may not command itself to the Honourable Minister'.³¹ His second subdivision plan called for nineteen holdings of smaller, but more politically acceptable areas.³² The Minister accepted the second proposal, although Marsh remained adamant that any applicants must have £1000 or more in personal capital as 'a large portion of the Government advance of £750 will go in buildings and necessary subdivision fences, and to stock this place only moderately, will cost upwards of £1,200 per section'.³³ Of the 121 applicants for the nineteen sections, forty-nine soldiers, all presumably with the required capital, were admitted to the ballot.³⁴ Marsh treated the successful applicants leniently, and he had a policy in Hawkes Bay of automatically postponing the second half-year's rent for two to three years at 4 per cent interest, so as to assist the settlers to start by stretching out their capital.³⁵

The policy relating to the amount of capital possessed by soldier applicants varied between land districts. In Marlborough the Commissioner reported that a number of soldiers enquired about the Erina settlement when it was opened for selection in March 1917, but 'the majority of those enquiring were un-financial and did not proceed further'.³⁶ A year later the successful Erina settlers applied for a remission of their first year's rent, claiming that they had paid most of their

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.* Brodrick passed the proposal to the Surveyor-General who, completely missing the point, claimed that the proposal was not feasible because there were privates who were in both financially and socially better positions than many officers.

³³ Memo from Marsh to Brodrick, 16 February 1920, L&S file 21/172, NA.

³⁴ George, 'The Depression of 1921-22', p.160, claims that the vendor of Ardkeen had recommended the property be subdivided into sections of 900 to 1100 acres. He then quotes the District Revaluation Board as claiming in 1924 that 'this was a good property spoiled by overstocking with men'. George makes no reference to the changing perception of what constituted an adequately sized section relative to commodity prices.

³⁵ Memo from Marsh to Brodrick, 22 December 1921, L&S file 21/219. Guthrie had promised the settlers on Glengarry that their postponement would be interest-free, however Marsh objected to this, claiming that every soldier settler in the Hawkes Bay owed postponed rent and that when news of the Minister's promise to Glengarry became known all soldier settlers would demand similar treatment. Brodrick sympathised but stated 'the only thing to do is to carry out the instruction'.

³⁶ Minute to the Undersecretary, 26 March 1917, L&S file 21/27, NA.

available capital in rent and that settlers in the North Island had received this assistance.³⁷ In reply, the Commissioner commented that his Board had originally only required the first half year's rent to be paid, but had since changed this policy to one where the applicants were expected to have extra capital resources sufficient for the whole first year's rent.³⁸ The settlers' application was declined by the Board, though the first year's rent was subsequently postponed after a further appeal.³⁹ Marsh's policy compares more than favourably with that pursued in Marlborough.

Concern for the wellbeing of the soldier applicants is evident in the procedures adopted by the Wellington Land Board in the ballot for the ^{at Armadale} Armadale settlement near Feilding. Rather than expect all the applicants to make a cash deposit to enter the ballot, the Board was willing to accept the soldiers bankbooks, if containing sufficient capital, as the deposit. According to McClure this 'saved unsuccessful applicants a loss of interest and the liability to lose or spend their capital'.⁴⁰

Issues around which the public reputations of McClure and Marsh arose had implications for both the soldier settlers and later images of the settlement scheme. At the heart of the matter was the issue of virtue. In the public perception the soldiers had, by their service, acquired the necessary virtue for the possession of land. The willingness, or otherwise, of the Government to provide this reward to the soldiers, unhindered by red-tape and harsh qualifying clauses, was for contemporaries the central question in the period up to 1920. The RSA wanted the scheme accelerated because men were drifting about the country attending ballots and wasting their scarce capital.⁴¹ The RSA felt that all the soldiers were deserving of only the highest quality treatment and that nothing should have been

³⁷ Petition from the Erina settlers to the Prime Minister, 18 February 1918, L&S file 21/27, NA.

³⁸ Memo from the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Marlborough, to Brodrick, 19 March 1918, L&S file 21/27, NA.

³⁹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 5 October 1918, p.53.

⁴⁰ L&S file 26/5/35, NA.

⁴¹ RSA Land Committee minutes, book 7, 16 April 1920, pp.1-2.

placed in their way of making good.⁴² The *Weekly Press* saw McClure's lenient policy as highly satisfactory⁴³ and not, as later writers have inferred, a dereliction of responsibility on the part of the authorities by placing men with little capital and experience on the land.⁴⁴

This raises the question of the nature of the existing safeguards for the promotion of successful land settlement by the State. The soldiers were being treated differently from civilian applicants for Crown Land.⁴⁵ Contemporary comment suggests that administration and supervision of a soldier Crown leasehold placed considerably more demands upon the various Commissioners and their Boards. The Commissioner for Southland reported that the work involved with a single soldier was five times greater than with a civilian selector.⁴⁶ He had informed Brodrick in May 1918:

One of the difficulties which the Board has to face in connection with applicants under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act is that they cannot be dealt with on a purely business footing. While obviously hopeless cases are weeded out, there are others on the border line to which we have to give the benefit of the doubt.⁴⁷

This was not a case of the local Board unofficially erring on the side of the soldiers, because their supposed liberality had official sanction from the highest

⁴² *Quick March*, September 1920, p.33. The minutes of the RSA Land Committee on 3 May 1920, recorded that all soldiers should be 'given equal opportunity to acquire sections of land (provided he has the experience and ability to work it)'. The comment in brackets appears to have been added later in a different hand.

⁴³ *Weekly Press*, 11 April 1917. It must be noted that the *Press* was an avid supporter of the Reform Government.

⁴⁴ See: Burdon, *The New Dominion*, p.38; Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, p.244.

⁴⁵ Sir George Hunter, the Reform Member for Waipawa, told the house: 'The soldier settler required to be treated in a very exceptional manner as compared with others. It was hard to get the soldiers to settle down to farming life', *NZPD*, 26 November 1918, p.409.

⁴⁶ Report of H.D.M. Haszard, Commissioner of Crown Lands, Southland, in Annual Report of Discharged Soldier Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1918, p.9. Haszard was subsequently appointed to the Canterbury District in 1918 but his ability was questioned. Brodrick later observed in his diary that Haszard 'feels the discharged soldiers' settlement work very much ... he is a nervous wreck and I doubt he will be able to hold office long', Brodrick diary, 17 November 1919, WTU.

⁴⁷ Memo from Commissioner of Crown Lands, Southland, to Brodrick, 11 May 1918, L&S file 26/1-4, NA.

offices of government. In May 1917, Sir James Allen, the acting Prime Minister, had informed the RSA conference: 'where the question of fitness arose the Land Boards proceeded in methods dictated by fairness and commonsense and not in hard and fast lines prescribed by head office... the Government would provide land for any soldiers who wanted it'.⁴⁸ Sir Francis Bell, Attorney General and Acting Minister of Lands, told the Legislative Council in October 1917 that, in the case of applications by soldiers the Land Boards took a liberal view in their deliberations as to the suitability of applicant.⁴⁹ McClure justified the lenient stance taken over applications by soldiers under section 2 on the grounds that risks had to be taken in cases where applicants could not contribute a substantial amount by way of deposit and that 'very little business could be done if those provisions [limit of 90 percent advance on proffered security] were strictly adhered to'.⁵⁰

Despite the apparent ease of acquisition of land holdings by soldiers, the RSA continued to claim that the Land Boards were exercising power in a discriminatory way in relation to the requirements for capital and previous experience.⁵¹ In April 1919, for example, Guthrie received an indignant letter from the Thames Valley RSA demanding to know why a soldier with no previous experience had been refused admission to a land ballot.⁵² The soldier referred to was, according to the Auckland Commissioner, 'a tailor with no previous experience who was advised by

⁴⁸ *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 May 1917, p.16; *The Evening Star*, 26 May 1917, clipping on L&S file 26/1-3, NA.

⁴⁹ *NZPD*, 16 October 1917, p.201.

⁵⁰ Memo from McClure to the Valuer-General, 19 March 1919, Valuation file 12/4811, L&S file 22/1030, NA.

⁵¹ RSA Land Committee minutes, book 7, 3 May 1920, RSA Headquarters, Wellington.

⁵² The Secretary, Thames Valley RSA to the Minister of Lands, April 1919, L&S file 26/1-6, NA. The antipathy towards the Government's land settlement policies may have resulted from the Thames RSA being dominated by supporters of the New Zealand Labour Party. The President of the local RSA was also President of the local branch of the Labour Party. See Barry Gustafson, 'The advent of the New Zealand Labour Party, 1900-1919', MA thesis in Political Science, University of Auckland, 1961, p.214.

the Board to get some experience and apply later; a weak case'.⁵³ In September 1919, the *New Zealand Farmer* commented:

There is no doubt that a man's capital or lack of it has influenced the Department to a certain degree in the past. Theoretically this fact should not be considered under the present law, but apparently lack of capital has a strong bearing upon what is considered the "suitability" of the applicant.⁵⁴

The issue of whether 'the present law', mentioned by the *Farmer*, covered the requirement that the applicants possessed some capital, revolved around the wording of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act, 1915, and subsequent amendments. Nowhere was it stated that a lack of capital or previous experience was to be a reason for the exclusion of soldiers from coverage under the Act. This was interpreted by the soldiers and some interest groups as assuring all soldiers of assistance under the Act no matter their present personal financial circumstances or their previous experience. A central component of the soldiers' position was their belief that they were owed something for their service. The Commissioner for Auckland complained that this translated into the soldiers making unrealistic applications to ballots for Crown Land, or for mortgage assistance under section 2, and that 'applicants strongly resent any suggestion that, in their own interests, they should apply for smaller areas'.⁵⁵ The Commissioner later told a group of soldiers that his Board recognised that they should be given 'every assistance to get on the land and make good there'.⁵⁶ He was obviously referring to 'realistic' applications.

Despite Massey's concern in 1917 that not all soldiers would make good farmers, reasons of political expediency rather than common-sense administration of the

⁵³ Memo from the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Auckland, to Brodrick, 15 May 1919, L&S file 26/1-6, NA.

⁵⁴ *The New Zealand Stock and Station Journal*, 1 September 1919, p.1230.

⁵⁵ Memo from the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Auckland, to Brodrick, 15 May 1919, L&S file 26/1-6, NA.

⁵⁶ *Liberator*, 15 November 1919, p.3.

scheme meant that the soldiers' view of their position also became the public stance of the Minister of Lands, David Guthrie. In a public defence of the Government's policy in May 1919, and in contradiction of those calling for a training scheme, Guthrie claimed that lack of experience and capital were not a bar to the soldier obtaining a land holding:

in the early days of administration it was thought by some Land Boards that it would be unwise to place on land men who had not had any farming experience, or who had not even enough money to pay the first half-years rent. But now the policy is... to give every facility to acquire land to any returned soldier who shows any aptitude for the work he will have to do to make a success of a farming venture. In fact the boards in many instances are going further than ordinary circumstances would be considered prudent from a business point of view.... The only qualification required by the land boards before approving an application for land, or for financial assistance, is that the man should have some farming experience, and be in a position to make use of the land allotted to him.⁵⁷

Guthrie's statement notwithstanding, the actual position was somewhat closer to the view of the RSA, and a perusal of the published statistics shows clearly that the soldiers still had to pass certain qualification criteria. The significant figures are the number actually entered into ballots after preliminary examination. For example, the Beattie settlement near Cambridge was balloted for on 17 September 1919, and of the 222 applicants for the six sections, 180 were admitted to the ballot.⁵⁸ In 1920 the Wellington Board admitted 50 of the 103 applicants to the ballot for the six Eaglesham Settlement sections near Wanganui.⁵⁹ By 31 March 1932, 15,123 applications under the 1915 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act had been received for Crown and settlement land, and 4,065 had been approved.⁶⁰ It

⁵⁷ *Evening Post*, 7 May 1919, p.7.

⁵⁸ L&S file 21/154, NA.

⁵⁹ L&S file 21/221, NA.

⁶⁰ Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1932, p.3. This figure could also include multiple applications. After an initially successful applicant in the Almadale settlement withdrew, the section was allotted without competition to L. Keeyes because he had unsuccessfully competed in six other ballots. He was allotted the homestead section because it had a large house and he had

is also apparent that qualifying criteria were being applied to section 2 applications. For example, in the year up to 31 March 1920 the Auckland Land Board considered 1,585 applications for mortgage assistance under section 2, and approved 794.⁶¹

Not all interest groups, however, sought a 'soft option' for the soldier settlers. This was also reflected in the concern of bodies, such as the Board of Agriculture and the National Efficiency Board, for the establishment of an agricultural training scheme for discharged soldiers. A Dunedin meeting of the Patriotic Executive described the policy of settling inexperienced men with little capital on the land as 'a perfect scandal'.⁶² In light of public utterances by Sir James Allen and Sir Francis Bell, this reflects a justifiable perception of the scheme. However, the actual operation of the settlement process by the Land Boards in the period up to 1919 was characterised by caution. The Wellington Land Board decided that all soldier applicants would be required to produce testimonials from well-known farmers, or farmers they had worked for, vouching for their previous experience.⁶³ In May 1918 the Commissioner of Crown Lands in Nelson claimed success for the settlement scheme in his region because care was taken to fit the skills and experience of the soldiers to land that would suit them.⁶⁴ It did, however, appear that many of the soldiers and their supporters misrepresented the degree of previous experience that some of the soldiers actually possessed.⁶⁵

four children. He had twenty years experience and £300 in capital, L&S file 26/5/35, NA.

⁶¹ Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1920, p.7. The Commissioner of Crown Lands for Auckland commented that his Board had declined fifty percent of section 2 applications, Special Report of the Auckland Land Board in response to the Enquiry Boards, *AJHR*, C.9a, Part A, 1923, p.44.

⁶² *Dominion*, 17 April 1917, clipping on L&S file 26/1-2, NA.

⁶³ Wellington Land Board minutes, 27 June 1918, L&S-W 12/17, NA.

⁶⁴ Memo from the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Nelson, to Brodrick, 20 May 1918, L&S file 26/1-4, NA.

⁶⁵ H.J. Ferguson, a returned soldier, applied for a Crown lease on 1 May 1919 under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act, declaring that he had seven years previous experience. The Land Board exercised its power of sale on 19 February 1924, claiming that, 'the Enquiry Board had classed him as a permanent failure on account of inexperience, wrong methods, unsuitability of stock, and insufficient working capital'. The Undersecretary intervened on Ferguson's behalf, suggesting that a report on file from the Crown Land Ranger was not so pessimistic and that

Due to political pressure from the Minister of Lands and the Government to speed up the settlement process, the position of the Boards changed during 1919. The pressure of the numbers of returning soldiers began to turn public opinion, and hence political concern, towards the question of repatriation.⁶⁶ If some of the Boards were more conservative in their settlement qualification criteria in the period before the armistice, this did not generally continue to be the case in the period 1919-1920. It can also be argued that the sheer number of soldiers applying for land swamped the system and this led to some expedient practices.

The operations of Section 2 of the 1917 Amendment Act, despite reducing the Crown's responsibility for procuring land, placed new and extended duties upon the Boards in comparison to Crown Land applications. Surveys of the minutes of the Wellington Land Board indicate that section 2 applications began to increase in number during 1918. By March 1919 263 applications had been approved, while in the year to March 1920 a further 4107 section 2 transactions were approved nationwide.⁶⁷ The production-line processing that is evident from the increasing use of printed application forms for various assistance indicate that attempts were made to streamline procedures but, as the statistics reveal, the workload of the Boards and the Department increased substantially from early 1919. The Annual Reports of the Department of Lands suggest that the staff barely handled the pressure of the soldier settlement work, while Brodrick regularly observed in his diary that both he and his staff were under intense pressure and 'how nervy were a good many of the Commissioners when pushed by so many soldiers applying for land'.⁶⁸ Christopher Turnor observed in 1920 that 'the administrative machinery is not

Ferguson had not had the benefit of revaluation. L&S file 26/5150, NA.

⁶⁶ Massey wrote to Guthrie from the Peace conference informing him: 'With so many of our soldiers now returning you will have a very busy time with soldiers' land settlement. You must insist on your officers doing everything possible for them and thus avoiding dissatisfaction and consequent trouble in Parliament'. Massey to Guthrie, 3 March 1919, Massey Papers, NA, cited in O'Connor, 'Some Political Preoccupations', pp.21-22.

⁶⁷ Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1919-1920. Refer to chapter 15 for a breakdown of these figures.

⁶⁸ Brodrick diary, 2 June 1919, WTU. D.J. George uses this quotation to question the administrative ability of the Department of Lands.

equal to the task it has to perform', and 'I found all the local land staffs hopelessly over worked and complaining bitterly'.⁶⁹ The pressure on the staff of the Department was considerable, and this is reflected in a comment in Brodrick's diary, when he noted that he could not keep his staff, and that he was at odds with the Public Service Commissioner over allowing officers to apply for positions in other departments.⁷⁰ Quite apart from this, many of the experienced officers were serving in the forces and their demobilisation continued at the normal pace.⁷¹ Brodrick's health broke down early in 1919, and he was diagnosed as being diabetic. His diary entries record the progressive deterioration of his health because of his illness and the increasing pressure of work.⁷²

The reduction of approvals and the eventual termination of the scheme was a consequence of the deteriorating state of the Government's financial position, and not brought about by any fundamental concern for the direction that the land scheme was taking.⁷³ As early as mid-1919 the scheme was in financial difficulties because of the heavy demands made by the soldiers. The Acting Prime Minister notified Massey of the difficulties caused by Guthrie exceeding his yearly budget of £800,000 by as early as July, and the action taken to overcome them, while Massey was at Versailles. Allen thought it prudent to continue the land purchase activities as 'it will be seen that the Government is short of money and has made no provision for carrying on the policy'.⁷⁴ The prospect of the 1919 election was obviously not far from Allen's mind. In mid-1920, on instructions

⁶⁹ Tumor, 'Land Settlement', p.27.

⁷⁰ Brodrick diary, various dates, 1919, WTU.

⁷¹ There were some exceptions and Brodrick put a case to Sir James Allen, the Minister of Defence, to give priority on returning troopships to experienced surveyors and draughtsmen.

⁷² Brodrick recorded in his diary 'I am very much overworked and it is not good for me in my present state of health, however it can't be helped - I cannot retire and leave the Dept at this juncture when there is so much on hand', Brodrick diary, 11 June 1919, WTU.

⁷³ Melling claims that Massey stopped operations under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act 'in the hope that by suddenly removing all returned soldiers from the land market, by cutting off their source of finance, he would force the inflated land prices to drop', Melling, 'The New Zealand Returned Soldiers' Association', p.90.

⁷⁴ Letter to Massey from Sir James Allen, 1 August 1919, Misc. correspondence, Allen papers, NA.

from Cabinet, Brodrick called a halt to the free spending suggesting that, in the case of section 2 applications for mortgage assistance for the purchase of private land, the Land Boards should only consider experienced men and 'reject all doubtful propositions'.⁷⁵ A virtual halt to all section 2 operations in May 1921 was further justified on the grounds that these single farm transactions did not contribute to the goal of closer settlement.⁷⁶ Brodrick suggested that the available capital should be directed towards helping soldier settlers heavily in debt with the stock and station agencies. Cabinet considered the situation and decided to cease operations of section 2 in September 1921.

This restriction on assistance outraged the RSA, which claimed that soldiers who had followed wise counsel and acquired experience before applying for assistance were now being disadvantaged.⁷⁷ The Government replied that able-bodied soldiers could still apply for land under the Land Act and the Lands for Settlement Act, with the Land Boards being instructed to give them special consideration. Assistance on to the land under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act was reinstated in November 1921 for soldiers who had been recuperating from injuries or tuberculosis, and men continued to be settled by the Department of Lands through to the Second World War.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Departmental Circular from Undersecretary for Lands to all Commissioners of Crown lands, L&S file 26/1-7, NA. A survey of the minutes of the Wellington Land Board shows that by early 1920 the Board was refusing a greater proportion of applications than had been the case earlier. This suggests that greater numbers of soldiers were trying their luck for a loan, but this might also reflect the activities of land agencies fuelling the final flurry of the land boom.

⁷⁶ Letter from the Minister of Lands to an Opunake land agent, 10 May 1921, L&S file 26/274, NA.

⁷⁷ It had been estimated at the 1920 RSA annual conference that between 3,000 and 4,000 returned soldiers were actively looking for land, while another 6,000 who were working wanted to settle on the land, *Liberator*, 15 January 1920, p.3.

⁷⁸ Department of Lands Accounts Circular 5, 28 November 1921, L&S file 26/274, NA.

CHAPTER 10

PROBLEMS AND PORTENTS: THE SOLDIERS' VIEW

The first returned soldiers to be assisted on to farms in 1915-16 were settled under the existing Land Act and the Land for Settlements Act. By 20 March 1916 three discharged soldiers had been allotted sections by the Wellington Land Board, and 13 soldiers still serving overseas had obtained Crown leases, mainly grazing runs, under section 24 of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1915.¹ In May 1916 dairying sections near Kopua in Hawkes Bay were balloted to soldiers under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act.² Soldiers were also settled on some vacant sections in the Takapau settlement which had been opened for settlement prior to the war. The trend of settlement during 1916 was related to the available supply of land, with the major focus being on the Wellington and Auckland Land Districts. Wellington District offered a variety of land types ranging from the most remote areas of virgin Crown Land on the Wanganui river, to areas of Settlement land on the Manawatu plain only a few miles from Palmerston North. The early trend for a high demand for land in the North Island compared with the South was identified by Brodrick in the 1918 Annual Report of the Department. The eventual division of the total number of soldier settlements and single farm transactions came out at a 60/40 split in favour of the North Island.

This thesis does not investigate every soldier settlement that was established, nor the various types of settlement ranging from the section 2 single farms through section 3 single farm and group settlements and on to the larger settlements established on Crown and Settlement Land which were spread throughout the country. However, a random survey of the surviving files of the Department of Lands and Survey has shown a continuity in the problems faced by many of the settlers during the first years of establishment. Although types of establishment

¹ Memo from Brodrick to Massey, 20 March 1916, L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

² *ibid.*

problems during the early phase of land settlement were not confined solely to soldiers, certain problems do appear unique and were primarily as a result of the soldier settlers' under-capitalisation. As was noted above, D.J. George claimed in his thesis on the 1921 depression that structural and administrative problems were plaguing the soldier settlement scheme before the crash of commodity prices and the subsequent problems experienced by the soldier settlers. George implied that the Department and the Massey Government were incompetent in developing and administering the settlement scheme. A more balanced approach might be to consider what was achieved, despite administrative problems and the economic uncertainty of the period.

As with any other candidates for Crown Land, the soldiers' future success could not be definitively established at the application stage, and none of the Land Boards were under the illusion that all successful applicants would go on to be successful settlers or farmers. The underlying motivation was the provision of access to the land and not, as would be the case in the Second World War scheme, access to operating and financially viable farms.³ The attitude in the Department of Lands, from the Undersecretary down, tended to emphasise the personal element in regard to the success or failure of the settler. This strongly expressed ideal of the work ethic coloured the attitudes of the Land Boards in their dealings with individual soldiers. Yet, while the soldiers' future prospects were being evaluated on their personal work habits, certain structural problems were also to play a factor in both the real and perceived experiences of the soldiers in the coming years.

In 1918, concerned with the disquiet being voiced by various pressure groups, Massey instructed Brodrick to make an enquiry into the operations of the

³ The 1918 RSA Conference had requested that the Government offer settlers the option of having sections ring-fenced with water supplies established, that houses and out-buildings be established and that the cost be capitalised. Guthrie replied that this would be contrary to the principles underlying the scheme which were according to him: 'That a self reliant settler should by his own labour earn so much of the money advanced by the Government as will enable him to live while the section is becoming productive as is now done by the ordinary settler whose labour is his only capital'. Letter from Guthrie to the General Secretary of the RSA, 4 September 1918, L&S file 26/1-5, NA.

settlement scheme.⁴ In February 1918 all 600 soldier settlers who had obtained farms up to that date were posted a questionnaire which included space for them to answer three questions relating to the type and profitability of their farming operation, and any suggestions regarding the scheme. (see page 183) 314 replies were received. The combined responses were forwarded by Brodrick to the various Commissioners of Crown Lands and their replies are informative as to their individual approach to the scheme. Marsh from Hawkes Bay provided a comment on each of the sixty-six soldier settlers who had replied from his district. In contrast, McClure from Wellington provided some general comments on each of the large settlements in his district and stated that 'where the settlers do their best... they cannot fail to make a success of their holdings'.⁵

In their replies to the questionnaire the soldiers voiced concern about rental values, the size of sections, problems of access, and the shortage and cost of materials for fencing and building, while many requested that the Government provide an extra £250 on current account for development purposes. In 1917 Massey had already assured soldiers that should they need development finance in excess of the £500 already provided, they had only to apply to their local Land Board.⁶ The Commissioner of Crown Lands for Canterbury, with some prescience, observed that the soldiers' complaint was valid, and that a more liberal view on the provision of development finance would be required in the future. The Canterbury

⁴ The RSA also decided to send a circular to soldier settlers at this time. Brodrick complained that members of an RSA delegation had been present when he had discussed the wording of the letter with Massey. The RSA sought information about access to properties, the adequacy of government advances for stock and equipment, and the general contentment of the individual settler: *Dominion*, 15 March 1918; *New Zealand Farmer*, January 1918, p.52; RSA executive committee minutes, book 1, 8 February 1918, p.133, RSA Headquarters, Wellington. No record remains of the tenor of the soldiers' answers.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Massey, in reply to a question in the House, stated that it had been decided to provide an increase of £250, over and above the £500 limit, if circumstances warranted it, *NZPD*, 3 October 1917, pp.604-605; In November 1918 Guthrie informed the House that the Government considered £500 to be 'a reasonable limit for house-building, stocking etc'. Guthrie observed that where real need was proven the extra £250 was freely given, but he impressed upon the members that 'they could not cast money to the wind', *NZPD*, 26 November 1918, p.413.

Wellington, 25th February, 1918.

*Mr. A. B. Smith
c/o Mr. F. McEneaney
Raukōhanga
Raetihi*



Section *23* Block *XIII* *Manjama* District. *Settlement*
Area: *302.0.00* *R.L. 105*

Sir,—

In order that the Government may be informed of the progress and requirements of the discharged soldiers who have settled upon the land, the Right Hon. Mr. Massey, Minister of Lands, has directed me to make the necessary inquiries from the soldiers themselves, as well as from the officers of the Lands Department, to enable him to understand the position. I would, therefore, be obliged if you will fill in the answers to the following questions and post them to me at your earliest convenience. The replies need not be confined to direct answers to the questions, but may be expanded so as to convey the opinion of the soldier filling them in.

In forwarding this circular I desire to point out that the Government is anxious and willing to do what is reasonable to assist the soldier settlers to become successful farmers, and that no such financial assistance and other advantages as the soldiers enjoy have ever before been afforded to settlers in New Zealand. I would therefore ask you to seriously consider the matter before writing your replies, for no good can result unless the suggestions you make are practical and capable of being given effect to.

(1.) What kind of farming are you carrying on?

Sheep & cattle

(2.) Do your operations already produce a satisfactory living, or have you a reasonable prospect of making one when your holding is in a more advanced state of productivity? If not, state the reason.

No.. I'm about two years if I am not worried for rent & interest till I get a chance to get going.

(3.) Have you any suggestions to make regarding the conditions under which you are working?

As long as the Government will give me some encouragement for the next two years I am bound to make a success

(Answer to the above questions may be continued on back if necessary.)

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

T. N. BRODRICK,

Under-Secretary.

Board had been refusing to make recommendations in the majority of such cases.⁷ Marsh made the petulant comment that the soldiers would have been demanding £500 extra, instead of £250, if the regulation had stipulated that amount.⁸ Charles Crispin, a settler on the Erina settlement in Marlborough, stated in his reply to Massey's questionnaire that he had found that he required twice as much capital as he had considered necessary twelve months earlier.⁹ The call for an increase in the amount of capital available from the Government was widespread and in 1918 the limit was raised to £750. There was much criticism of the lack of capital provided to the soldiers by the Government and, as a bench mark for establishment costs, a special committee of the Taranaki War Relief Association provided a costing of the expenses it thought should face a soldier on 60 acres of good dairy land. The figure of £1000 was decided upon to cover: House, £250; shed, £75; herd of cows, £400 [no number was given but assume 30 at one cow to two acres]; milking machine, £186; sundries, £89.¹⁰

While the Government and the Department of Lands and Survey saw their relationship with the settlers on an individual basis, the RSA considered that the soldier settlers, particularly those on the larger settlements, should be treated as a group irrespective of capital, experience, or the quality of land. This made effective administration difficult and placed the Land Boards in a quandary as how to deal with the particular requirements of individuals on settlements. Marsh noted that increased current account finance would materially assist those soldiers who showed promise but who were temporarily struggling. But he warned, 'if those who are well on their feet receive assistance there will be an outcry from the struggling ones, and until the latter have shown grit and a determination to sit tight and battle through, it would be unwise to listen to their first crys' [sic].¹¹ This was consistent with Marsh's attitude towards advances and, as early as 1916, he

⁷ L&S file 26/1-4, NA.

⁸ Memo from Marsh to Brodrick, 25 May 1918, L&S file 26/1-4, NA.

⁹ L&S file 26/66, NA.

¹⁰ *Quick March*, 1 August 1918, p.25.

¹¹ Memo from Marsh to Brodrick, 25 May 1918, p.4, L&S file 26/1-4, NA.

resisted a proposed increase from £150 to £200 as the proportion of the £500 advance that could be used to provide a dwelling on a farm. He claimed that to increase the material comfort of the soldier would reduce the amount available to purchase stock, and so undermine the capacity to meet his commitments to the Crown. Marsh claimed that 'the man with the minimum house and maximum stock will come out on top'.¹²

The most significant legacy of nineteenth-century land practice applied to the soldier settlement scheme was the regime of closer settlement and the tendency, based on political rather than economic needs, to subdivide available land so as to settle the largest number of individuals. The Tiraumea and Ardkeen settlements have already been cited as examples of this. Although officers of the Department of Lands would later claim that the soldiers had not complained of the section sizes when they entered ballots, dissatisfaction was often voiced by the soldier settlers over the size and location of their holdings.¹³ The soldiers' decision to apply for land, and the subsequent decision on which settlement or property best suited their needs, was considered by the Boards and officials to be soldiers' individual decisions. As one of the requirements for admission to a ballot was that soldiers had personally inspected the property or settlement and accepted that it was what they wanted, the official view was that the soldiers had entered into the scheme with their eyes open. Subsequent complaints by soldiers suggest that this might not have been so in all cases and that the inexperience of many soldiers was

¹² Memo from Brodrick to Massey, 13 August 1916, quoting Marsh, L&S file 13/25, NA.

¹³ The perceived 'economic' size of holdings was related to both the expected degree of success of the holder, and the state of the commodities market. The drive to increase production through the 1920s and 1930s was a response to declining prices and so perhaps the call for larger sections or, inversely, the criticism of smaller sections, was part of the economic adjustment process. Soldiers took up sections on their own volition and it would appear that subsequent dissatisfaction relates to changes in expectation and the perceived minimum size required 'to make good'. Brodrick informed Guthrie in August 1921, after the depression, in relation to the Erina settlement that 'it must be conceded that under present market conditions most of the sections are too small', L&S file 21/27, NA.

jeopardising the success of their settlement even before they had set foot on their land.¹⁴

Poor subdivision was also a complaint, with the best-known examples being in the South Island. Lees Valley in the foot hills of the Southern Alps was subdivided so that selectors either had too much winter country or too much summer country, but insufficient of each class of land to be very successful.¹⁵ A retiring member of the Canterbury Land Board later claimed that the problems facing soldier settlers in Canterbury were the result of poor subdivision, not high prices, and that the responsibility for this rested with the Surveyor-General's office in Wellington.¹⁶ However, other examples from around the country suggest that Land Boards had some say in subdivision of settlement land.¹⁷ Unanswered is the question of the supposed lack of expertise shown by those responsible for subdividing properties. A case showing the difficulties involved in this, even for 'experienced locals', is provided by Henry Guthrie-Smith. In his book on Tutira station, Guthrie-Smith alluded to the subdivision of the run after World War I. He observed that the new settlers repeated the mistakes of earlier settlers despite the fact that the property had been subdivided by himself and others experienced in the nature and demands of the country. He noted that:

these tenants of mine, these part possessors of Tutira were very human, that they were repeating the very errors over which earlier owners had themselves come to grief - injudicious sellings, indiscriminate burning, purchase of stock from dryer localities and better soils. I... had omitted to take into account that these new-

¹⁴ In his contemporary novel *Follow the Call*, Frank Anthony, himself a soldier settler in Taranaki, captures the desire of the soldiers' for land. His main character, Mark Woodford, remarks that he 'snapped' a place because he did not want someone else to beat him to it and 'I found out, afterwards, that the section had been in half the land agents' hands in Taranaki for about ten years.... I was just as proud of that farm as if it had been a model place', p.4.

¹⁵ Powell, 'Soldier Settlement in New Zealand' p.156.

¹⁶ *Quick March*, May 1922, pp.30-31.

¹⁷ Brodrick noted in his diary, 1 September 1915, 'To Mangaweka. Went over the Otamakapua estate with members of the Land Board. Decided the place could not be cut up smaller than it was because of roading costs', Brodrick diary, WTU.

comers lacked the aggregate eighty or ninety years' experience of the trio who had evolved the scheme of settlement.¹⁸

In spite of returns from primary products being high in the period up to 1921, farm costs had also risen. Timber and wire were both scarce. The supply of the latter was particularly difficult as shipping shortages and the entry of the United States into the war meant that contracts could not be fulfilled. The inability of settlers to fence their properties restricted farming operations.¹⁹ The settlers on the Kopane settlement near Palmerston North complained bitterly that they had been unable to start farming operations because the wire and posts they had been promised did not materialise. The soldiers claimed: 'They had good country for which they were paying a fair rent and... the Government should put them in the way of making them pay without the slightest hindrance'.²⁰ The Wellington Land Board refused to grant a request from Kopane for remission of rent over the period when the soldiers could not farm their properties because 'it would create a dangerous precedent'.²¹ Despite the general awareness of the materials shortages, soldiers saw the responsibility for their provision as resting with the Government. The settlers on the Mangateparu soldier settlement, near Morrinsville, felt that there was 'an utter lack of sympathy or organisation' in the Auckland Land District and, that 'all timber, iron, bricks, wire and etc. should have been carted during the summer in readiness for the soldiers wants as these... were known prior to the settlement being balloted for'.²² The soldier settlers were not only disgruntled at the

¹⁸ H. Guthrie Smith, *Tutira: The Story of a New Zealand Sheep Station*, 2nd Edition, Edinburgh, 1953, p.412.

¹⁹ The United States Government banned the export of iron and steel products that were not associated with the prosecution of the war. The New Zealand Government attempted to buy in bulk and supply the wire to soldier settlers at cost price, but success was limited. The Department of Lands also made enquiries to the New South Wales Government as to possible supplies of rabbit netting. L&S file 26/726-2,3, NA.

²⁰ Report of a deputation before Guthrie at Kopane settlement, 26 June 1918, L&S file 21/79, NA.

²¹ Wellington Land Board minutes, 31 October 1918, L&S-W 12/17, NA; Memo from McClure to Brodrick, 31 May 1919, L&S file 21/79, NA.

²² Letter from the Secretary, Morrinsville Farmers' Union, to the Minister of Lands, 13 August 1919, L&S file 21/102, NA. The Farmers' Union were concerned that dissatisfied soldiers 'only went to swell the city agitator crowd'.

shortages but also at having to use their advances or own capital in fencing sections. This was a greater problem for those selecting virgin country who had to do both ring and subdivision fencing.

Many of the soldiers on the larger settlements established on repurchased private land complained about the condition of the pastures. Their claims were justified in that some of the Land Boards had a policy of letting grazing rights on estates during the time between purchase and selection. This policy was defended on the grounds that the pasture had to be kept from going rank but it meant that the soldiers were often faced with bare paddocks which set back production for a season and also meant that stock could not be grazed for a time. In 1919, in light of the difficulties that had been experienced with pasture, Guthrie directed that the practice was to stop unless given his approval.²³ Marsh was disappointed that so little return was received from the grazing rights on the Glengarry settlement prior to the ballot but, as he petulantly observed, 'we bow to the demand that prospective soldier settlers' interests must be protected'.²⁴ Some of the estates purchased by the Land Purchase Board were in a worn-out condition when acquired. The Fairfield estate near Awahuri suffered reversion problems because of the delay in selection and, even before this, the pastures were described as 'well used'.²⁵ The early problems of pasture exhaustion were more acute for the settlers on the Te Whiti settlement in the Wairarapa. As late as 1928 the settlers saw some of their economic problems stemming from earlier pasture problems and their spokesman informed the Minister of Lands, A.D. McLeod:

The unfair advantage in regard to our settlement was this: our place was bought somewhere about September. Things were left between ourselves and the vendor as to when we could get on. Mr Ogilvie said that he could not get out in September as he had his ewes in

²³ Circular from Brodrick to all Commissioners, 20 June 1919, L&S file 21/187, NA. For example the Opotiki RSA complained that if the stock was not removed from the Hukutaia settlement there would be no feed for the settlers to utilise. The official reply from the Commissioner noted that the manager of the estate thought the pasture was in fine condition, L&S file 21/133, NA.

²⁴ L&S file 21/219, NA.

²⁵ L&S file 21/34, NA.

lamb. We knew that meant six months rent for nothing at the end of the year. I asked him if he could hold the land until the end of April. He said no.... He made his own arrangements to get out on the 1st of February, but promised that he would leave us feed to go on with. On the day of the sale there were thirteen sheep to the acre as well as cattle.²⁶

The time of year that properties were opened for selection could also create problems for the new settlers. The ballot for some sections on the Mangateparu settlement was held so late in the year that a crop of hay could not be harvested for supplementary feed.²⁷ The problems of pastures and fencing reveal that the official justification for the purchase of small properties on which soldiers could supposedly obtain a quick financial return was clearly erroneous.

A familiar echo from the nineteenth century was the call for roads or improved access to sections. No consistent policy emerged but, in general, the Department of Lands and Survey allowed for the forming of roads by the Public Works Department in the costs of subdividing settlement or the preparation of Crown Land. Subsequent metalling and other improvements were expected to be met by the settlers through local body rates.²⁸ Problems arose because the counties, although at the forefront of the call for soldier settlements in their regions, claimed that they could not afford the metalling of roads.²⁹ The settlers on the Mangateparu settlement complained that the roads had still not been formed five months after the ballot. Enquiries by Brodrick to the Public Works Department

²⁶ Notes of an interview between the soldier settlers on the Te Whiti settlement and the Minister of Lands, 6 August 1928, L&S file 26/5/23, NA.

²⁷ L&S file 21/102, NA.

²⁸ The Chief Surveyor of the Department of Lands informed Brodrick: 'It has always been our custom to give the settlers good earth roads and load cost of same on to their lands, leaving them to arrange for the metalling later on when they become more prosperous and their land rises in value', L&S file 21/102, NA.

²⁹ Sir Francis Bell made clear the Government policy on roading soldier settlement land in response to the statement by the Member of Parliament for Rangitikei over the Fairfield settlement, that counties could not provide enough funds from rates to form and metal roads. Bell to Newman, 26 September 1916, L&S file 21/34. The Fairfield settlers were the victims of an impasse over finances between the local county and the Government and even after four years little progress had been made.

revealed that the delay was caused by 'logistics problems' and that despite the settlers being offered work on the roading they had refused because of health problems and because the ten shillings a day wages were less than contract 'navvies' would get.³⁰ The case of the Glengarry settlement revealed that the Public Works Department was having difficulty providing funds or labour for roading work. When these roads had been formed Guthrie had proposed to offer a pound for pound subsidy of £1000 to the Dannevirke County Council for metalling to induce the County to raise a loan for the purpose. The County held out for, and eventually received, a grant of £800 to metal the heaviest used sections of road.³¹ In 1921 the RSA sought a rebate on the portion of the soldiers' rent which constituted a loading for roads during the period when roads and ditches had not been constructed. Brodrick replied that the amount saved per individual soldier was too small to justify the exercise.³²

Roading of those settlements which had been established by local patriotic societies using sections 2 or 3 of the 1917 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act created problems for all parties. Both the Hukutaia settlement near Opotiki, and the McGregor settlement in the Rangitikei valley suffered set-backs in their progress because of problems with the vendors promising in the first instant to provide access to the sections then, due to disputes with the local counties over the route of the proposed road, reneging after receiving payment for the land.³³ The Government saw the issue as one between the soldiers and the vendor, while both these parties looked to the Government to provide the roading. It was problems like these that received sympathetic press coverage and were used by Harry Holland, leader of the Labour Party, to indict the Government for settling soldiers on land without access.³⁴

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ L&S file 21/219, NA.

³² Letter from Brodrick to the General-Secretary, RSA, 9 July 1921, L&S file 26/1-9, NA.

³³ Letter from the Opotiki County Clerk to Guthrie, 11 July 1921, L&S file 21/133, NA.

³⁴ *New Zealand Times*, 26 September 1923, clipping on L&S file 26/5/28, NA; *NZPD*, 23 August 1923, p.651.

A related and equally divisive issue was that of local body rates. What should have been a simple disbursement for the soldier settlers was complicated by the high price of land during the time they took up their sections, and the soldiers' subsequent claims for special consideration. The rating roll value of a property was determined by the Valuation Department after a county-wide valuation based on the productive value of the land in its unimproved state. The improvements on a section related to all the material developments, while such things as quality of access also played a part in determining the Government valuation of a section. The situation facing new soldier settlers in the period 1916 to 1919 was generally that the value on the county rating roll was based on earlier and lower land prices.³⁵ The period 1919-21 saw a determined effort on the part of the Valuation Department to bring the rating roll values up to par with the prices paid for land, and the related expected income from primary commodities. This had the effect of burdening the new settlers with high rates.³⁶ In 1919 the RSA, responding to what it saw as unfair treatment of soldiers, requested that 'no valuation of soldier settlers' land for rating purposes should be made for three years after it is first taken up.³⁷ This suggestion did not find favour with Brodrick, who was aware that the local bodies would strongly object to such a policy, while Guthrie observed that 'the soldiers already have so many concessions and so much help that they should be able to pay the rates without difficulty'.³⁸

Despite Guthrie's comment, the Government was not unsympathetic to the problems of rates payments for new settlers. In 1918 Massey had requested Brodrick to investigate means whereby soldier settlers could be exempted from rates. Brodrick pointed out the difficulties of this proposed policy but suggested

³⁵ As noted in the previous section the normal revision duties of the Valuation Department had been disturbed by the provision of section 2 of the 1917 act which allowed soldiers to purchase private land.

³⁶ Belshaw has calculated that local body rates more than doubled in the period 1913-14 to 1925-26 while commodity prices rose only some 38 per cent, 'The Economic Position of the Farmer', p.59.

³⁷ Letter from the General-Secretary, RSA, to Guthrie, 12 February 1919, Valuation file 12/481 and L&S file 13/25-10, NA.

³⁸ Letter from the RSA to Guthrie, 12 February 1919, minute from Brodrick to Guthrie and reply by the Minister, L&S file 13/25-10, NA.

that the special provisions applying to swamp and bush sections under the Land Act could be applied to land selected under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act.³⁹ The later complaints by soldier settlers suggest that this was not pursued. The claim of settlers on the Tiraumea settlement that their rates were too high was rejected by the Eketahuna County, which blamed the settlers' difficulties on the high price paid for the land by the Government in the first place. The local Soldier Settlement Supervisor claimed that the County was charging an exorbitant rate while the soldiers claimed their rates had risen 100 percent compared to their neighbours rise of between 30 and 50 per cent.⁴⁰ Ironically the Eketahuna County then asked the Government to help it out because it could not recover the rates from the settlers.⁴¹ The Auckland Provincial Executive of the New Zealand Farmers' Union took up the case of the Streamlands settlement near Warkworth with the Valuer-General after the unimproved value of the sections had been raised by £1 8s. per acre following the soldiers' acquisition. The Valuer-General claimed that normal procedures had been followed.⁴²

The position of the counties was difficult in that they appeared to be unsympathetic towards the soldiers but, at the same time, were under pressure from them in many areas to complete roading. In 1919 the New Zealand Counties' Association conference passed a remit requiring the Government to be responsible for the rates on soldiers' land for five years after it was taken up.⁴³ The counties were also inhibited by the provisions of the War Regulations Act 1914 which was intended to protect soldiers from actions in the civil court while on overseas service and immediately after discharge. The provisions were extended on two occasions

³⁹ Memo from Brodrick to Massey, 8 January 1918, L&S file 13/25, NA.

⁴⁰ Various letters and reports, L&S file 21/37, NA.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *New Zealand Herald*, 8 May 1919, p.6. The concern of the RSA had been raised by the case of the Streamlands settlement, which had been revalued upwards immediately the soldiers had taken possession, RSA Executive Committee minutes, book 3, p.34, RSA Headquarters, Wellington.

⁴³ Letter from Sir Francis Bell, Minister-in-Charge of the Valuation Department, to Massey, 19 February 1920, Valuation file 12/481, NA. As at 16 October 1919, the Government would have owed counties £20,000 for rates on soldiers' properties, *ibid.*

during the war and, at the lobbying of the RSA, twice after hostilities had ceased, which meant that effectively a soldier was impervious to civil actions until 1924.⁴⁴ Although section 208 of the Counties Act 1920 empowered local bodies to remit rate arrears, few were willing to be generous to soldier settlers, particularly as the creation of the Main Highways Board in 1922 led to strong pressure on the counties to bring roads up to acceptable standards for motor vehicle traffic.⁴⁵ Despite the 'moratorium' being intended to protect soldiers, the War Regulations Continuance Act 1920 was cited by the Manawatu Oroua Electric Power Board as the reason it would not connect soldier settlements to the supply system. The Board claimed that it had no means to recover the cost of installation, should the soldiers default on payment, because the soldiers could not be sued, nor could Crown Land have a lien placed upon it. In response, the various soldier settlements in the region petitioned the Minister of Lands, requesting they be treated in the same way as other ratepayers.⁴⁶ The Valuer-General had earlier summed up the problem when he observed 'this Department cannot differentiate between soldiers and other settlers - there can be only one value for land by whomsoever held'.⁴⁷

The problems of rates payments became more acute for the soldier settlers after the 1921 depression and, despite the operations of the Dominion Revaluation Board after 1924 to reduce the value of holdings for rent purposes, the soldiers were often left to pay rates on rating roll values set during the boom period and in some cases the rates came to more per year than the rent. The counties were obliged by law to levy rates on the roll values and could only help the settlers by remission of arrears. However, some counties showed little sympathy for the position of the soldier settlers. For example, in 1923 the Chairman of the Piako County Council

⁴⁴ L&S file 21/160, NA. For the impact on the counties and their responses see for example: A.J. Dreaver, *Horowhenua County and its People: A centennial history*, Levin, 1984, pp.270-272; Evelyn Stokes, *A History of Tauranga County*, Palmerston North, 1980, pp.182-183; Laurenson, *Rangitikei*, pp.109-111.

⁴⁵ Morrell and Hall, *A History of New Zealand Life*, p.239.

⁴⁶ Various correspondence, L&S file 22/3382, NA.

⁴⁷ Memo from the Valuer-General to Brodrick, 22 April 1919, Valuation file 12/481, NA.

was reported to have suggested that the County should strictly enforce all rates and that the soldiers should leave if they could not make their properties pay. He called upon other counties to follow a similar policy.⁴⁸ In 1926 the RSA requested that the Valuation Department revalue all counties containing large soldier settlements 'with a view to removing existing anomalies'.⁴⁹ In October 1926 the Wairoa County Council complained that the settlers on the Ardkeen settlement were well behind with their rates and were objecting to paying on the rating roll values.⁵⁰

The issue of rates suggests that the soldier settlers were so undercapitalised that they could not meet their obligations. But local body rates, always a contentious local political issue, provided the soldiers with an arena to assert their deserving status. It was also an issue that brought their financial positions to the eye of the local community in a forceful way.

The problems faced by the soldier settlers were not in themselves excessive or unusual for the period. The evidence suggests that there were problems on individual settlements in relation to material shortages, poor pasture, and problems of access. However, these problems were not entirely the responsibility of the Government and it did not have it in its power to solve many of them. Of more significance is the issue of subdivision of settlement land and here the problems that arose did so primarily because of the scheme's political underpinning and the heavy demands made the soldiers. Burdon observed that as land settlement for the returned soldiers in New Zealand increased through 1919, and as larger sums of money were voted to the scheme, Sir Joseph Ward protested that the consequently inflated land values would result in bankruptcy for many of the soldiers but this

⁴⁸ This was cited by Harry Holland in the House, *NZPD*, 8 August 1923, p.650.

⁴⁹ Letter from the RSA to the Valuer-General, 12 July 1926, Valuation file 12/572, NA.

⁵⁰ Letter from the Wairoa County Council to the Minister of Lands, 16 October 1926, L&S file 21/172, NA.

'show of courage rather than worldly wisdom' did not endear Ward to the increasingly politically powerful RSA pressure group.⁵¹

⁵¹ Burdon, *The New Dominion*, p.27.

CHAPTER 11

SUPERVISION OF THE STATE'S INVESTMENT

This chapter investigates the degree of official involvement in the lives of the soldier settlers and it identifies the influence of the pioneer model of hard work and economic individualism as shaping the attitudes of all parties involved.¹ Official intrusion into the soldiers' lives changed over time in response to economic circumstances and the progress of the soldier settlers' farming operations. The settlement period of the first few years was, for most of the soldiers, the time when land was cleared, fenced, and generally developed, while buildings were erected and stock purchased. Government advice focused on these areas. As the soldiers' farms progressed, the concerns of the Crown Land Rangers and Land Boards moved towards productive farming practices and the attempts to ensure that the settlers' met their financial obligations. Related to this was the ongoing issue of the Department impounding farm-production proceeds through either cream-cheque orders, or placing bills of sale over stock and wool proceeds. Also discernible over the period of the interwar years is an attitudinal change on the part of the Department of Lands which related to new emphasis on the ideals of economic and scientific efficiency.

A high degree of paternalism is evident in the actions of the various Commissioners and their Boards in their dealings with soldier settlers. This is also reflected in the attitudes of the Crown Land Rangers and the Supervisors of Soldier Settlements. A central question to an understanding of the settlement scheme, and its eventual outcome, is why were the soldiers seen in a different light to civilian Crown settlers? There are two reasons: first, the position of the soldiers was unique, with unprecedented interest from a variety of community groups. A successful scheme was seen as a political and social necessity. Second, the Land

¹ Refer to chapter 2. The appeal of the farming lifestyle after the experience of army life and the trenches was obvious, particularly the autonomy that a farmer was seen to experience in forging his own economic destiny.

Boards and the men at the cutting edge of the scheme were well aware of the shortcomings of a scheme that allowed men with little experience and capital to become farmers, and so responded with an increased degree of supervisory interest. This was necessary to protect the Crown's investment, as the normal responses to errant or defaulting tenants could not easily be invoked because of the public outcry. The relationship between the authorities and the section 2 freeholders is more difficult to categorise in terms of supervision, and the Land Boards did not have the same coercive powers with these men as they had with Crown tenants. From the soldiers' perspective, the supervision of the Department was something they had called for in the first years of settlement. Further, they had also been assured in *The Soldiers' Guide* that they would receive expert advice from the Departments of Agriculture and Lands in developing their farms and purchasing stock.

The relative ease of access to the land which characterised the settlement scheme did not remove from soldier settlers personal responsibility for their own success, but administrators also exhibited ambivalent attitudes towards the degree of personal responsibility the soldiers could exercise. In October 1918 the Commissioner of Crown Lands for Taranaki observed that 'a combination of firmness and sympathetic handling will be required in all cases'.² A month earlier Guthrie had informed the RSA that 'it seems to me that if he is to succeed the would-be settler must prove his *bona fides* and initiative by working on his own section and looking after his own interests and I am not in favour of taking all responsibility from him'.³ Similar sentiments were voiced by the Wellington War Relief Association in considering applications for loans for the payment of soldiers' first half-year's rent. The association claimed that it was 'highly desirable to give the soldier some stake in his farm, and it is an act of mistaken kindness to make things so easy for him that he feels he relinquishes but little if he abandons his

² Memo from the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Taranaki, to Brodrick, 9 October 1918, L&S file 26/1-4, NA.

³ Letter from Guthrie to the General-Secretary, RSA, in reply to remits from the RSA Dominion conference, 4 September 1918, L&S file 26/1-5, NA.

enterprise'.⁴ The Association considered that the soldiers' best asset was their labour and that the majority would 'make good their rental if possessed of the will to do so'.⁵ Early in the settlement process, McClure, in contrast to his reputation for leniency in dealing with soldier settlers, had complained to Brodrick that settlers having difficulty meeting their obligations on the Makowai settlement, near Palmerston North, showed 'a want of energy and application and the sooner these men realise that it is necessary to work to succeed the better it will be for them and the state'.⁶

The demands placed upon the supervisory capacity of the Department of Lands were greatly increased by the settlement of soldiers during the first phase of the soldier settlement scheme up to 1918.⁷ Supervision of the soldier settlers was the responsibility of the Crown Lands Rangers who were the trouble-shooters for the local Commissioner and Land Board. Their duties were to ensure that Crown lease obligations were fulfilled, to inspect timber rights and noxious weeds, and 'by all legitimate means aid and encourage tenants'.⁸ As at 30 March 1918 there were thirty Crown Land Rangers spread over the country with responsibility for some 34,000 Crown tenants.⁹ It was the Rangers who were to provide most of the supervision that Guthrie, in response to a request for closer supervision, assured the RSA 'is being exercised at the present time by the Departmental Officers and Land

⁴ Wellington War Relief Association, Annual Report, 1918, p.7, WTU. It was previously noted that local patriotic societies played a significant role in the establishment of some soldier settlements. They were often the first port of call for a soldier who was without capital, for a loan for rent and other purposes. The Wellington War Relief Association granted some loans for the soldier to pay the first half-year's rent. However these were difficult to obtain and soldiers had to give a cream-cheque order to secure the loan which was paid directly to the Department of Lands, 'so as he would not be tempted to spend it on other things'.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Memo from McClure to Brodrick, 19 April 1918, L&S file 21/30, NA.

⁷ Allan, 'The Resettlement of Discharged Soldiers', p.125, claims that the failure of soldier settlers in Canterbury was, in part, attributable to a lack of qualified advice from the responsible departments.

⁸ Miscellaneous report on matters relevant to the administration of Crown Land, L&S file 22/322, NA.

⁹ *New Zealand Gazette*, 1918, vol.1, p.1646; Annual Report of the Department of Lands and Survey, *AJHR*, C.1, 1918, table 26, Total Numbers of Selectors on the Books of the Department of Lands and Survey, p.28.

Board'.¹⁰ This statement did not mesh with the experience of many of the settlers and a constant refrain in the early period was that officials of the Department had not visited the settlements for lengthy periods.

Early in 1919, in response to both the complaints of the Commissioners that they were being stretched to the limit by the demands of the soldier settlers, and the realisation that the problems associated with the scheme were likely to increase with the return of the main-body of the Army, Guthrie initiated the process of appointing special Supervisors of Soldier Settlements.¹¹ This action also reflected the influence that bodies such as the National Efficiency Board (until its dissolution early in 1919), the Farmers' Union, and patriotic societies were bringing to bear on the Government in relation to the settling of inexperienced men on the land.¹² That the soldiers were also seeking help of a more substantial nature than that apparently available provides an indictment of the training scheme. In September 1919, a plea was made by 42 settlers of the Mangateparu settlement near Morrinsville, for help in beginning their farming operations:

All of these men are only to[sic] willing that you should send among them a supervisor to see that they work wisely and well and at the same time watch and guard your interests and see that they put back into the land that which your representative should consider best for all parties concerned.¹³

¹⁰ Letter from Guthrie to the General-Secretary, RSA, 4 September 1918, L&S file 26/1-5, NA.

¹¹ The *New Zealand Herald*, 20 January 1919, reported that Guthrie was to appoint a supervisor of soldier settlements in each Land District. The issue of supervision was on the agenda of the Commissioners' conference in Wellington during late April, 1919, *New Zealand Herald*, 5 May, 1919. Section 11(1) of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act, 1919, authorised the appointment of Supervisors with the same powers as Field Inspectors of Crown Lands.

¹² The Wanganui-Waitotara branch of the National Efficiency Board had suggested that local Boards of Trustees should form Boards of supervision in their respective areas. The Boards could, it was suggested, give authoritative advice on the inevitable problems that some soldier settlers would face, National Efficiency Board/ Wellington 724, NA.

¹³ Letter from Allan Maxwell, Secretary of the Mangateparu Soldier Settlement Association, to the Minister of Lands, 12 September 1919, L&S file 21/102, NA.

Despite Brodrick's protestations that the appointment of Supervisors had become a matter of urgency, the process proceeded slowly, hindered by the policy of the Public Service Commissioner to appoint only from within the Public Service.¹⁴ A number of men with long-standing farming experience applied for the positions but the appointments, announced on 2 July 1919, were of men from the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Lands and Survey.¹⁵ The general tone of letters from soldier settlers requesting the appointment of Supervisors was for well-known and respected local farmers but the policy was not to appoint retired farmers but rather younger government men. This corresponds with concerns expressed by the Commissioners and the Undersecretary that the scheme had to remain free from sentiment for the protection of the State's investment.

Guthrie described the Supervisors as 'experts in farming' whose duty it was 'to advise the settlers on any matters regarding the farming of their holdings'.¹⁶ The Supervisors were supplied with cars so that they could more quickly travel around the Land Districts. Despite this use of modern technology, their effectiveness must be questioned when the size of the Land Districts is viewed in relation to the number of soldiers settled, and their geographical distribution.

It was the Government's intention that the Supervisors would provide quite specific help to the soldier settlers with regard to such things as placement of buildings, subdivision fencing, clearing and cultivation, stock types and purchase, and the

¹⁴ L&S file 26/1/75, NA.

¹⁵ P Barry, formally Fields Inspector, Department of Agriculture was appointed to Taranaki; L.J.B. Grant, Fields instructor, to Wellington; H.F. Hursthouse, Crown Lands Ranger, to Marlborough, Nelson, Westland; J.P. Wilson, Public Trust Inspector of Securities, Canterbury; A. Simpson, Fields Inspector, Department of Agriculture, Otago; C.S. Neville, Inspector of Stock, Department of Agriculture, Southland; A.B. Jordan, Crown Lands Ranger, Auckland; C.H. Wells, returned soldier and formally an employee of New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency, Hastings, Hawkes Bay. Of the early appointees J.P. Wilson declined the appointment to Canterbury and, instead, G.R. Stevenson, Acting District Clerk, Public Health Department, was appointed. Wells accepted a position with Loan and Mercantile in Pahiatua and declined appointment. Neville refused to go to Southland, claiming his previous experience related only to Canterbury. His replacement, N.E.H. Hubbard, was working at this time on a farm at Mangaweka. L&S file 26/1/75, NA.

¹⁶ Memo from Guthrie to Massey, 22 December 1919, L&S file 26/1-6, NA.

execution and subsequent inspection of securities.¹⁷ Their duties were similar to those of the Rangers, whose job was to safeguard the Crown's investment and report on the progress of the settler. However, the Supervisors were required to provide more specific practical advice. The duties of the Taranaki Supervisor were the subject of a report in September 1920, when the Commissioner objected to what he saw as the establishment of a separate department within the local office. The Supervisor was reported to

have complete charge of all transactions such as the purchase of stock, seeds, manures, implements etc. and the tenants approach him personally or by letter relative to their requirements.... Files quite separate from the general Land Office files are kept for the purpose of recording all correspondence with the Supervisor, also a book showing the balance of each soldier's account.... Mr Barry appears to be "the manager of the soldier business both inside and out of the office after the time the soldier is placed on the land" He argued that he could not make a success of the same unless he had complete control and purchased all stock etc.¹⁸

In July 1921, as a result of the economic downturn and the precarious position of many of the settlers, it was decided to rearrange the duties of the Supervisors and Rangers so that properties could be inspected every three months. In October 1921 McClure reported to Brodrick that 'the Supervisor and the Crown Lands Ranger have the Eketahuna District under strict surveillance and reports on the individual settlers are received every month'.¹⁹ The Rangers took over the whole of the duties relating to stock purchases and the inspection of securities while the Supervisors were freed to concentrate on advice relating to farming practice. The change in duties angered the RSA which suggested that the Wellington Supervisor had the confidence of the soldiers while the Rangers might not. That the professional capabilities of the Supervisor were considered superior to the Ranger

¹⁷ Letter from Brodrick to J.D. Grey, Secretary of the Wellington Repatriation Board, 20 November 1919, L&S file 26/1/75, NA.

¹⁸ Memo from Inspector W. Robertson to Brodrick, 28 September 1920, L&S file 26/1/75, NA.

¹⁹ This comment was prompted by a report from a Treasury Official to Brodrick that settlers in the area were not devoting the attention they should to their farms and that a number of the settlers possessed motor cars, memo from McClure to Brodrick, 7 October 1921, L&S file 26/274, NA.

is reflected in a comment made by McClure. He was at pains to point out to the Wellington District Supervisor that where Rangers may have given advice to settlers which the Supervisor saw as not in the soldiers' best interests 'tact will... have to be used'.²⁰ Some concern was expressed that abuses might occur if Supervisors lost the responsibility for buying stock on the soldiers' behalf.²¹ The Supervisors were eventually incorporated into the Ranger staff of the Department as the soldier settlers passed from the establishment phase and became more experienced in their farming enterprises.

It is difficult to judge the success of the supervision exercise. It was reported in 1924 that the supervisors were too few to adequately deal with all the soldier settlers and that Rangers often had to help.²² Christopher Turnor noted that although there were Supervisors, 'they have no power to insist upon their advice being taken'.²³ As late as 1922, it was claimed in the House, some soldier settlers in the Manawatu district had not received visits from any official of the Department of Lands since taking up their sections.²⁴

An indictment of the supervisory process is provided by the actions of the New Zealand Farmers' Union which late in 1922 asked its various branches to nominate two prominent and experienced members in each district 'to act as honorary advisors to the soldier settlers.... The duties suggested are to visit the soldier settlers, observe and advise them about the purchase of seed, implements, manure, stock etc. and generally keep an eye on their operations with a view to assisting them'.²⁵ This action was taken at the request of the RSA and reportedly proved a success. The Glengarry settlers received a visit from the appointees of the

²⁰ Letter from McClure to L.J.B. Grant, 25 July 1921, L&S file 26/1/75, NA.

²¹ District Secretary, Wellington District RSA, to the Minister of Lands, 1 August 1919, L&S file 26/1/75, NA.

²² Memo from J.B. Thompson, Undersecretary for Lands, to the Minister of Lands, 24 September 1924, L&S file 26/1/75, NA.

²³ Turnor, 'Land Settlement for Ex-Servicemen', p.28.

²⁴ *NZPD*, 18 January 1922, p.399.

²⁵ *Quick March*, October 1922, p.21.

Southern Hawkes Bay Farmers' Union during which 'much useful advice was given to them'.²⁶ Guthrie was supportive of outside advice to the soldiers from 'experienced farmers who have made good', which he described as 'always helpful in urging the new settlers to face and overcome the difficulties that may confront them'.²⁷

Hand-in-hand with the notion that the soldiers would work hard in their farming enterprise was the expectation that the soldiers would wisely spend the finance advanced to them by the Government for development purposes on current account. The work ethic was forcefully expressed by the Boards which also strongly disapproved of those who spent advances on employment of outside labour.²⁸ The Wellington Land Board resolved to advise a settler on the Putorino settlement that 'he must discontinue at once to employ others to do the work which, in order to obtain profitable results from his holding, he should do himself'.²⁹ A similar attitude is evident towards the erection of buildings. It has been noted that Marsh saw creature comforts as a lower priority than quality of stock. A settler on the Otawhao block near Takapau noted in his reply to Massey's 1918 circular that his progress was hindered by a lack of finance. Marsh commented that the soldier had 'put all his surplus money into building improvements - should have got a good wife first'.³⁰ The Wellington Board expressed similar views, suggesting that the soldiers should exercise the greatest economy in the direction of buildings.³¹ However, if the soldiers satisfied their local Land Board as to their willingness to abide by the rules and behave in an acceptable pioneering manner, it was not so difficult to obtain building advances. With the support of the Ranger, a settler in

²⁶ *Farmers' Union Advocate*, 18 November 1922.

²⁷ Letter from Guthrie to a Kaukapakapa farmer regarding the appointment of supervisors, 25 August 1922, L&S file 26/1/75, NA.

²⁸ The Official Report of the Department commented: 'There is a tendency for some soldier settlers to rely too much on outside labour to do the work for which government advances have been made instead of doing it themselves wherever possible, as "improved-farm" settlers would do', Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1918, p.2.

²⁹ Wellington Land Board minutes, 29 November 1917, L&S-W 12/17, NA.

³⁰ L&S file 26/1-4, NA.

³¹ Wellington Land Board minutes, 26 April 1918, L&S-W 12/17, NA.

the Hunua area near Taumarunui made application for an advance to build a house. In passing the application to the Undersecretary for the Minister's approval, McClure noted that 'the settler has been living in tents since he took up the section and these are rotting now and the damp is trying to his health. He is deserving of consideration'.³²

The issue of family labour did not receive a great deal of attention in reports on individual settlers during the early phase of settlement. The position for New Zealand settlers was not as severe as that identified in Victoria by Marilyn Lake. There, she claimed, the pool of labour represented by the settlers' wives and children was seen as a crucial component in the closer settlement plans of the State of Victoria and was central to the process of establishing an Australian 'yeomanry'.³³ The booklets produced by the New Zealand Army Education Department in the United Kingdom highlighted the fact that 'the farmer's wife should not be a serf on the farm, neither should the welfare of the children be prejudiced by their labour being unduly conscripted'.³⁴ In June 1918 the Wellington Land Board resolved that 'where any settler is milking 15 cows or over without assistance, advances will be considered by the Board for the purchase of a milking plant'. The advance was to be subject to the Department of Lands having the right to select the machine. A month later the Board considered various makes and chose the 'Farmers Milking Machine' as the one most suitable for soldier settlers.³⁵ The Board considered the machines to be a good investment because they allowed the settler extra time during the milking season to develop his property, and also contributed to improved yields by speeding up the milking

³² Application, 12 August 1918, L&S file 26/540, NA.

³³ Marilyn Lake, *The Limits of Hope: Soldier Settlement in Victoria 1915-38*, Melbourne, 1987, pp.72-100, 143.

³⁴ 'Land Settlement', New Zealand Expeditionary Force Education Department pamphlet, 1919, WTU.

³⁵ Wellington Land Board minutes, 27 June 1918, L&S-W 12/17, NA. A month earlier the Board had turned down a request by three settlers for the Board to take over their liabilities on milking machines, *ibid.*, 30 May 1918.

process and so reducing the time the cows were away from good grass.³⁶ A willingness by the Land Boards to finance milking machines may have been primarily a concern for efficient production, but the implications are obvious for the soldier settlers' families. The issue of family labour emerged in the later 1930s, when many of the settlers began to exhibit health problems associated with their war service. The need to employ labour had to be weighed against the economic position of individual farms. Teenage children were often described as being able to assist on properties.

Rising returns for primary produce not only precipitated a land boom but also pushed up the price of livestock. Allowing that many of the soldier settlers did not have experience, their prospects were not improved by the injudicious purchase of stock. Brodrick had suggested at the beginnings of settlement in 1916 that where current account advances were made for the purchase of stock, Rangers should inspect the animals before authorising payment. To help the soldier the Rangers were also instructed to attend all stock sales in the locality of a recently balloted settlement. In June 1917 Brodrick instructed Commissioners that soldiers should be discouraged from purchasing stock at the public saleyards as not only were the soldiers bidding against one another, but unless the soldier was a good judge of stock, 'the public saleyards are the very last places to look'.³⁷ Brodrick also observed that soldiers should spend as much of their advances on the development of the land, as opposed to stock purchase, while prices remained high.³⁸

Just as the land market provided for the accumulation of profits by speculators, so too did stock sales, and there were reports of farmers establishing cartels to push up the price of scarce animals. In defence of its record, the Stratford branch of the New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency informed the Commissioner of Crown Lands for Taranaki that 'up to the present [August 1918] we have not entertained

³⁶ L&S file 26/1018, NA.

³⁷ Circular to all Commissioners from Brodrick, 6 June 1917, L&S file 21/79, NA.

³⁸ *ibid.*

any business with or to returned soldiers without the local Crown Ranger's permission and sanction'.³⁹ Christopher Turnor observed during his visit that unscrupulous operators were deceiving inexperienced men. He suggested that the Government should provide stock rather than money to the soldier settlers.⁴⁰ This option had been considered and discarded in 1916, when the Commissioner for Auckland had suggested that two breeding farms be established to provide stock, but Brodrick could not see much of price advantage over the open market.⁴¹ The soldier settlers in the North Auckland Land District felt so aggrieved at their treatment by stock agents that when the Commissioner suggested that the situation was not as the soldiers suggested, the local RSA passed a resolution of no-confidence in him.⁴²

The Wellington Board, despite its reputation for liberality in placing men on the land, exercised a stringent attitude towards spending advances on stock. In September 1918 the Board agreed to make an advance available to a settler on the Putorino settlement for the purchase of 20 cows 'to be selected by the Advisory Board of the Hunterville Patriotic Society', and 'in the event of Mr Holden not paying proper attention to his cows or allowing them to deteriorate in value, the section to be forthwith forfeited'.⁴³ Despite this imposition, the procedure did have support from at least one soldier in the Taumarunui area, who described the process of stock purchase:

Suppose I want 10 head of milking cows. I am told to give full particulars to the ranger, who will specify which firm the cows are to be bought through. Actually this purchase is on behalf of the

³⁹ L&S file 13/25, NA.

⁴⁰ Turnor, 'Land Settlement for Ex-Servicemen', p.28.

⁴¹ Memo from Brodrick to Sir Francis Bell, 28 November 1916, L&S file 26/1-2, NA. Bell minuted Brodrick to refer the issue to the Department of Agriculture.

⁴² *Quick March*, September 1920, p.33.

⁴³ Wellington Land Board minutes, 26 September 1918, L&S-W 12/17, NA.

Government. I cannot make a bad deal under the circumstances.⁴⁴

The appointment of Soldier Settlement Supervisors was intended to bring a more effective service to the soldiers, but problems of the number of soldiers requiring help taxed the system. A proposal was made by the Commissioner of Taranaki Land district to have 'competent and uninterested farmers' certify stock that a soldier might wish to purchase or sell, where the Ranger or Supervisor was unavailable. Despite the contradiction inherent in the proposal, it was approved by Guthrie in April 1920. By September 1920, an Inspector of Offices reported to Brodrick that some of the purchases approved by local Taranaki farmers had not proved successful, although he considered that the local office had not nominated the right men.⁴⁵ It is not clear whether this referred to farmers who were not good judges of stock, or to farmers who had dealing interests inimical to the best interests of the soldiers.

While soldier settlers remained dependent upon the Department for financial advances restrictions continued to be imposed upon their personal freedom in dealing with stock. In 1929 it was decided that soldiers whose current accounts were in a good position, and who had satisfactory skills, could operate their own stock deals. The Department was following standard business practice and quite strict control was also experienced by many civilian farmers who were dependent on stock companies for seasonal and stock replacement finance.

If the reaction of the Boards to their role as guardians of the soldier settlers was affected by politics and the settlement processes, so too were the reactions of the soldiers. The moral position of the soldiers, as perceived by the community, was such that it was no longer enough to give the soldiers access to the land and hope for the best as 'the day of the settler who had nothing but an axe, a half-crown,

⁴⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, 9 May 1919, p.9. There is an implication that the soldier did not see a financial commitment from himself in this transaction.

⁴⁵ Wellington Land Board minutes, 26 September 1918, L&S-W 12/17, NA. Memo from Inspector W. Robertson to Brodrick, 28 September 1920.

and a big heart is passed'.⁴⁶ Although it was not clearly articulated at the time, Land Boards and Departmental officials treated the soldiers differently from the average Crown tenant. The Boards and the Department were also aware that to succumb to all claims made by the soldiers and their supporters would foster a sense of dependence. However, the very scheme itself was fostering just such a reaction. In July 1917 the RSA had claimed that a £500 advance for development was insufficient and that £1000 was required.⁴⁷ Despite the fact that few previous land settlement schemes had offered such largesse, the soldiers wanted more. The evidence strongly suggests that the 'reward for service' aspect of the scheme, the bounty that Brodrick claimed the scheme was not, came to shape the attitude of the soldier settlers.⁴⁸

The antagonisms and stresses that emerged from the early administration of the scheme affected its public image, and while the Land Boards tried to operate the plan in the context of previous settlement schemes, the soldiers were demanding more from the system than the Government was prepared, or indeed able, to offer. The dependent position of the soldiers, primarily caused by their lack of capital and previous experience, fostered an attitude contrary to the yeoman ideal and notions of economic individualism that were underpinning the attitude of the Department of Lands and many of its officers. The Commissioner for Southland reported to Brodrick in relation to Massey's 1918 circular that:

there is a certain proportion of the soldier tenants who do not seem to appreciate the exceptional terms the Government is already extending to them and on these men I am rather afraid the circular will have an unsettling effect tending to encourage them to make claims for further concessions.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *New Zealand Farmer Stock and Station Journal*, 1 October 1919, p.1391.

⁴⁷ *Auckland Weekly News*, 12 July 1917, p.17.

⁴⁸ Report from Brodrick to the acting Minister of Lands, 13 November 1916, L&S file 26/1-1, NA.

⁴⁹ Memo from the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Southland, to Brodrick, 11 May 1918, L&S file 26/1-4, NA.

This conflict of interests could not have come about without the soldiers' strongly espoused attitudes of deservedness, which were supported by the community. This argument does not suggest that the soldiers were the makers of their own dependent situation but, rather, that political imperatives created a position which was, by human nature, exploited. A soldier writing to a Hawkes Bay newspaper early in 1921 claimed that 'there will be a number [of soldier settlers] who will shelve all responsibility on the Government'.⁵⁰ Once the soldiers were settled on the land it became politically unacceptable to eject them.

This dependency situation became manifest early in the scheme. The shortages of materials and stock have been noted, but the soldiers also wanted to be insulated against ecological difficulties. In May 1917 the Rangitikei Patriotic Society appealed to the Government on behalf of soldier settlers on the Greystoke settlement near Marton. The Society stated that previous milking season had been affected by drought and the soldiers were anticipating having difficulty paying their rent. The Crown Lands Ranger interviewed the settlers and reported 'that from my observations whilst on the settlement and its generally favourable appearance the settlers are not in such dire straits[sic] as the association represents'.⁵¹ The same concern is evident of financial protection. A settler on the Erina settlement informed Brodrick that 'I am hard pushed for cash. I have a drill and binder which I had to pay for myself.... Is there any chance of the Government taking them over? If so I could get my deposit back from the firm'.⁵² In late 1919 six soldier settlers in the Opouri Valley near Blenheim requested that the Government finance their shares in a proposed dairy factory in the area which would also serve other soldier settlers and civilian holders. The Commissioner replied that 'should a company be formed by the non-soldier settlers, I see no reason why this department should not guarantee the shares of our soldier settlers'.⁵³

⁵⁰ *Daily Telegraph*, Napier, 16 March 1921, clipping on L&S file 26/1-7, NA.

⁵¹ L&S file 21/24, NA.

⁵² C.J. Baron in an interview with Brodrick, 19 August 1921, L&S file 21/27 NA.

⁵³ Memo from the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Marlborough, to Brodrick, 18 November 1919, L&S file 22/2601, NA.

The position relating to the restrictions on the purchase of stock has been mentioned, but restrictions were placed on the sale of stock while the Department of Lands held bills of sale on them. It was normal business practice to protect securities on which money was loaned but, as the Commissioner for Taranaki observed, 'it will take a little time to instil into some of them their responsibilities and the restrictions under the Bills of Sale: some of them are inclined to chap a little when told that all sales of stock etc. under Bills of Sale must receive the grantor's consent'.⁵⁴ H.M. Skeet, Commissioner of Crown Lands for Auckland, was concerned that the 1917 Regulations dealing with Bills of Sale were so drastic that they would work against the soldier settlers being able to achieve a financial existence independent of the Department. His concern centred on the use of a blanket Bill covering all stock and chattels on soldiers' properties, irrespective of the origin of the funds that had purchased the stock or materials. This had been introduced as an administrative expedient so as to reduce the time-consuming need to obtain separate Bills of Sale for every individual transaction undertaken in the course of establishing farms. As Skeet had observed with some prescience, the ability of the Crown to legally claim all stock and chattels on a property would make stock companies and private individuals wary of investing in soldier farms, so making the settlers exclusively dependent upon the Crown for operating advances.⁵⁵

The problem of control of securities became more acute with the economic downturn precipitated by the 1921 depression, and it continued to occupy the Department for some years. In 1925 the Auckland Commissioner wanted some form of legal action instituted against soldier settlers that would not 'seriously reflect on their positions as citizens or delay progress on their holdings, but will force them to realise and fulfil their obligations.... To allow soldier settlers to promiscuously dispose of various stock or chattels... is likely to lead to very grave

⁵⁴ Commissioner of Crown Lands, Taranaki, to Brodrick, 9 October 1918, L&S file 26/1-4, NA.

⁵⁵ Memo from Skeet to Brodrick, 24 October 1917, L&S file 13/25-6, NA.

evils'.⁵⁶ The use of section 58 of the Chattels Transfer Act to prosecute wayward mortgagors was slow, cumbersome, and expensive. It also meant charging the defaulter with an indictable offence which, according to a Crown Law office opinion, made the likelihood of a jury finding against a returned soldier remote as 'the sentimental side appeals very strongly to a jury and any suggestion made to them by Counsel of hardship whether based on facts or not, is in cases of this kind almost invariably sufficient to obtain a favourable verdict to the accused'.⁵⁷

The operations of the Dominion Revaluation Board were intended to place the soldiers in a position from which they could draw confidence in the future and 'make good', but this did not remove the onus of the soldier to continue to behave in a manner prescribed by the expectations of the Commissioners and Land Boards. In late 1925 the Undersecretary had informed Commissioners to pay particular attention to the character and ability of settlers when considering requests for assistance. Was the settler dependable and likely to justify special assistance? One of the evaluation criteria was whether the settler employed a disproportionate amount of labour.⁵⁸

The operations of the Dominion Revaluation Board had also focused concern on the need for standardisation and central control in the Department of Lands and Survey, which the Minister of Lands described as a 'huge commercial concern and not a simple survey department as formerly'.⁵⁹ The increasing financial responsibilities of the Department, brought about by the need to closely supervise the Crown's investment in the soldiers' farms, also highlighted the need for standardisation of values of stock and chattels over which mortgages were held. It had also been recognised by the Department that greater supervision had to be exercised in regard to advances made on current account. In November 1927 the

⁵⁶ Memo from Commissioner of Crown Lands, Auckland, to Thompson, 29 August 1925, L&S file 13/25-13, NA.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ Memo from Thompson to all Commissioners, 13 November 1925, L&S file 26/274/64, NA.

⁵⁹ McLeod, quoted in the *New Zealand Times*, 27 January 1925, clipping on L&S file 26/1-10, NA.

Department instructed all Commissioners to re-organise their procedures so as to review annually the financial position of every settler. This involved classification of the settlers into four categories ranging from good to bad.⁶⁰ The soldier settler mortgagors were required to file an inventory of stock and chattels which was to be examined by the Field Inspector and, where necessary, the Department was to take action to protect the Crown's interest.⁶¹ The institution of such close supervision was to prove significant from 1929, when hopes for future prosperity were again deferred by depression. At the time, however, the regime of stock inspections drew complaints from the soldier settlers. One correspondent to an Otago newspaper complained bitterly at the restrictions under which the soldier settlers had to operate and observed:

The Government field inspector comes flying along, pulls up at the settler's gate, jumps out of his car, pulls out his notebook. Then, after bombarding the poor unfortunate soldier settler with a heap of questions and useless advice, he quietly reminds him that owing to the fact that he is under lien to the Otago Land Board for stock, it is necessary for him to have all particulars of same. "How many sheep?" Your last count shows you had perhaps two or three more - "where have they gone to?" After telling him they may have died, he starts on about cattle. How many cows, what colour, age, breed; and if they don't happen to have a name he quietly instructs you to concoct a name for each one. The field inspector advises that cows over which the Government has security must not be without a name.... "is your rent and interest paid?" If it is, he gives you a pat on the back and tells you how well you are doing on the farm and the prospects for next season are extremely bright. Of course the soldier settler who does the work never sees any of the proceeds for the wool and lambs. The Dunedin office collects that, and if he has any necessity to ask for a refund after rent and interest is paid, to allow him to buy food or clothes, he is lucky if he gets an answer to his letter.... If all the soldier settlers in New Zealand stuck together as they did when they were soldiers in France the Minister of Lands and his colleagues would have a sorry time.⁶²

⁶⁰ Accounts Circular 247, 11 November 1927, L&S file 26/1-12, NA.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² Fred Waite, Reform Member for Clutha, sent McLeod the unidentified newspaper clipping on 28 August 1928. McLeod defended the Department's operations as normal business practice whereby loans were made against chattels, while the Chattels Transfer Act required stock to be identified by some reliable mode of description, letter from McLeod to Waite, 4 October 1928, L&S file 26/1-13,

The soldiers appeared, as some claimed, to be little more than serfs of the Government. However, not only were the soldiers required, in terms of the pioneer model, to be good strong workers but, by the mid-twenties the developing sense of professionalisation of the workplace and the cult of scientific efficiency was impacting upon the operations of farming.

The 1928 Report of the Dominion Revaluation Board noted the necessity for the application of 'up-to-date scientific methods' in the operation of farms. The report observed:

The best insurance against the effect of lower values of produce is the careful selection of animals - herd testing and drastic culling, care of the milk producer through proper feeding and the provision of shelter. It has to be recognised that farming of any kind cannot succeed through slipshod methods and the time has arrived when the science of farming must be the constant study of those engaged on the land.⁶³

The advent of scientific farming was reflected in the language used by the Land Boards and the Rangers to describe the settlers. In the early years of the scheme metaphors relating to the pioneer model predominated and the settlers were judged upon their ability to undertake hard physical work, live in harsh conditions and do without the softer pleasures in life, spend the majority of their time on the farm or section, and not employ labour. In 1918, a soldier settler near Taumarunui was described by the Commissioner as working his section satisfactorily despite a lack of experience. By 1922, he was described as doing good work on his section, while in September 1924 the Ranger reported: 'Montgomery, single, first class worker who has done good work stumping and ploughing'. One month later the Commissioner commented on the Dominion Revaluation Board evaluation form that the settler was a first-class worker 'who has done good work'. In contrast, a field inspector's report of 1930 on the same farmer noted:

NA.

⁶³ L&S file 26/274/64-4, NA.

I found the property in a very neglected state. Ragwort has taken over the cleared country - no attempt has been made to combat the weed - the fencing is all in poor order.... Regarding a remission of arrears, I have no recommendation to make as the settler has never made an attempt at farming the place. The settler has had a fair chance, but the place is in such a shocking state that it looks as if it would be useless to consider him further.

As a 'pioneer' Montgomery was highly regarded, but in July 1931 the property was forfeited, and the Commissioner observed that 'as a farmer Mr Montgomery is a hopeless proposition'.⁶⁴

The response of the soldiers to the arrival of depression in the late 1920s is instructive of the nature of the relationship that had developed between them and the Department of Lands. This is referred to in a general way in chapter 14. Notwithstanding that the general tone of requests for assistance was similar to the response to the 1921 depression, a new component was introduced in the form of a request by the RSA for soldier settlers to be rewarded for staying on their properties and meeting their commitments.⁶⁵ This request had its basis in the revaluation programme of the mid-1920s, when it was felt by some that the procedures discriminated against those soldier settlers who had worked hard and been financially responsible. The reply from the Minister, E.A. Ransom, exposed the dependent relationship that had developed and the essential underpinning to the Department's decisions in terms of helping the soldiers. Ransom referred to the soldiers' view of this as 'an inverted sense of probity' and went on to observe that, 'it would be impossible to provide reductions and concessions as a reward for hard work, perseverance, and an honest attempt to meet liabilities'.⁶⁶ The soldiers appeared to be asking for a reward similar to that which they thought they were receiving for their service. If the sacrifice of the war was to have meaning, then the soldiers had to continue to press for recognition of their special status.

⁶⁴ L&S file 26/540, NA.

⁶⁵ Letter from the General-Secretary, RSA, to the Minister of Lands, 16 April 1932, and the Minister's reply, 3 May 1932, L&S file 26/1-14, NA.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

One of the highly contentious issues of the settlement scheme in the longer term was the policy of impounding farm income to meet financial commitments to the Department. This usually involved cream-cheque orders or liens on the production of dairy farms, although yearly wool-clip proceeds were also exposed to the same policy. These had originally been used by the Department as a device to ensure the repayment of current account advances used to purchase dairy cows.⁶⁷ The Department was not alone in seizing percentages of the proceeds from farm production. Condliffe and Belshaw had observed in 1925 that the very nature of farming in New Zealand meant that, with little equity in their properties, most farmers operated on borrowed capital for which the price paid was often a loss of freedom in farm management decision-making. They noted that in extreme cases the farmer became little more than the working manager for the financial interests backing the operation, relying on them for working capital and, in some cases, for living expenses.⁶⁸ The position of the under-capitalised soldier settlers fitted this model well.

In the case of the 3,646 soldiers who depended entirely on dairying for their income, the regular monthly milk or cream cheque provided for an ease of accounting and, from the Department's view, a regular source of income for the quick repayment of what were seen as quickly depreciating stock securities.⁶⁹ The amount of the proceeds expropriated varied from as low as 12.5 per cent to as high as 100 per cent of the total proceeds from butter and cheese production and, as was the case with the general administration of the scheme, regional variation was apparent.

The procedure for taking orders had support from the Dominion Executive of the RSA, which claimed that soldiers who were making an honest attempt, and not

⁶⁷ The Wellington Land Board decided that a 12.5 per cent order was required to cover all advances for stock, Wellington Land Board minutes, 26 March 1919, L&S-W 12/17, NA.

⁶⁸ Condliffe and Belshaw, 'A Brief Survey of Rural Credit', p.336.

⁶⁹ Returns from all Commissioners, 5 October 1920, L&S file 26/1-7, NA.

overspending on non-essentials, had nothing to fear.⁷⁰ Although supporting the concept, the RSA had complained in 1922 that Boards operated very differently in various districts and the association used the examples of Canterbury and Auckland where, they claimed, the excessive amounts claimed on the orders were reducing the soldiers to starvation.⁷¹ During the early period of settlement, the amount of the cream-cheque orders also varied according to the perceived financial behaviour of individual settlers. In discussing the case of the Glengarry settlers, Guthrie informed the local Member of Parliament that the cream-cheque orders were a means of asserting control over mortgagors who had 'acted unwisely in spending more of the income from their holdings than was justified and in pledging their milk returns... to vendors of unnecessary machinery, etc.'⁷² Responding to one of the periodic public outcries over the higher amounts demanded, Brodrick informed the Guthrie that:

the percentage of the milk cheques retained by the Department varies according to the settler's personal reputation for meeting his obligations and his ability to properly farm the land.... Some soldiers who have been quite well able to pay have evaded doing so.⁷³

Brodrick appeared concerned that the soldiers were using government funds for extravagant purposes, and that they had to be firmly shown that they could not go on piling up debts without thought to the consequences.

The Department was also concerned that soldier settlers who had mortgages for stock and chattels with it were circumventing cream-cheque orders by giving orders to other creditors. In 1926 Commissioners were instructed that where such cases arose that could not be negotiated,

⁷⁰ A motion of the Dominion Executive of the RSA, quoted in a memo from Brodrick to Guthrie, 23 February 1922, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

⁷¹ Letter from the General-Secretary of the RSA to the Minister of Lands, no date[1922], L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

⁷² Letter from Guthrie to A. McNicol, Reform Member for Pahiatua, 3 March 1922, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

⁷³ Memo from Brodrick to Guthrie, 1 December 1921, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

immediate consideration should be given to calling up the mortgage moneys on some ground of default, or as will now often be the case, because the mortgage has fallen due for repayment. Such action would probably lead to a settlement.... This does not mean that there should be needless interference with clients' operations, but it is so that whenever necessary the Department should be in a position to take up a firm direction of affairs.⁷⁴

The position of the Government over the issue was exacerbated during the 1925 season by the high returns recorded for primary commodities, and the impending election. Rumours were circulating that the Government intended taking 50 per cent orders from all soldiers during the season so as to recover some of the postponed rents and mortgage payments reaching back to the 1921 depression. A Reform politician was sufficiently concerned over the activities of a 'red-fed' in his electorate stirring up the soldier settlers, that he got a clarification from the Minister of Lands that there was no policy of imposing compulsory orders to recover past debts.⁷⁵

The use of cream-cheque orders, particularly for higher amounts, drew a steady stream of public criticism in the press and in the House. A claim in the House by R. Masters, the Liberal Member for Stratford, illustrates both the emotion raised by the issue and the mis-information surrounding it. Masters took exception to what he saw as harsh and severe treatment that certain Land Boards and Commissioners were inflicting upon soldiers, and he quoted an example of a soldier settler in Taranaki who had been required to authorise a 100 per cent reduction from his cream-cheque.⁷⁶ The Commissioner for Taranaki reported that in no case was an order for 100 per cent taken in expectation that all would be kept and that, of the 28 soldiers with such orders, 18 received 50 per cent refunds, while only 2, at their own request, received a nil refund.⁷⁷ The Undersecretary observed that in some

⁷⁴ Department of Lands and Survey Accounts circular 222, 4 November 1926, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

⁷⁵ Letter from the Minister of Lands to R.P. Hudson, Reform Member for Motueka, 21 September 1925, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

⁷⁶ *Evening Post*, and *Taranaki Herald*, 8 July 1922, clippings on L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

⁷⁷ Memo from Thompson to the Minister of Lands, 11 July 1922, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

cases the 100 per cent order was used as a device to protect soldier settlers from pressure from their private creditors who were demanding unreasonable amounts in repayment. The Commissioner claimed that he disbursed the money collected in a fair fashion, leaving sufficient for the soldiers to live in a decent manner and to see that the interests of a man's wife and family were safeguarded.⁷⁸

The administration of the cream-cheque order procedure was unpopular with the dairy companies. At least three companies in three different regions refused to pay the amounts collected to the Commissioners.⁷⁹ They complained that the procedure added to their administrative costs and, in the case of the Eclipse factory near Dannevirke, almost put the company out of business.⁸⁰ Solicitors for Eclipse complained that soldier settlers in the area, particularly those on Glengarry settlement, were threatening to boycott the company and supply other factories in the area if orders on their cream cheques were collected.⁸¹ The Department claimed that the Commissioners not only had the Power of Attorney over the suppliers' milk but, where a Bill of Sale existed over the stock, they could also force settlers to supply designated factories.⁸²

⁷⁸ Memo from McClure to Brodrick, 1 December 1921, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

⁷⁹ The Northern Wairoa Co-operative dairy company at Mangawhare, near Dargaville, refused to accept any orders, while the Mauriceville West dairy company in the Wairarapa refused to pay the amounts under the orders to the Commissioner until administrative details relating to exchange on cheques was dealt with, and the Rai Valley factory in Marlborough refused to recognise the orders. Mauriceville succumbed to pressure from the Crown Solicitor but there was an ongoing argument with the Northern Wairoa company, culminating in a threat from the Commissioner for North Auckland threatening foreclosure on the suppliers' stock, various letters, 1924-1925, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

⁸⁰ The Moa Farmers' Cooperative at Inglewood claimed a 1 per cent commission on the amounts collected to cover administration fees. Treasury advised the Undersecretary that claims for commission should be resisted because of the great expense of soldier settlement and the indirect advantages gained by the companies in increased turnover. Letter from the Secretary, Moa Farmers' Co-operative Association to the Minister of Lands, 25 November 1924, and a memo from Treasury to the Undersecretary for Lands, 21 March 1925, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

⁸¹ Letter from the Eclipse Dairy Company to Sir Francis Bell, the Attorney General, 28 October 1924, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

⁸² Commissioner of Crown Lands, Taranaki, to the Undersecretary for Lands, 13 December, 1933, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

The position of factories with a large number of soldier settler suppliers was difficult, not only because of the threat of withdrawal, but also because these companies tended to have made substantial advances to the settlers for living expenses from the factory shops and, in some cases, provided financial assistance for the purchase of stock. The Murchison Co-Operative factory refused to accept a 100 per cent order because of the quantity of goods that had been supplied to the settler in question. The company decided that there was a matter of principle at stake as the company was 'dependent upon the measure of "consideration"' that the Commissioner might decide to give it.⁸³

The image of the private mortgagee being completely self-interested does not fit the position of these small dairy companies, particularly those in more isolated areas.⁸⁴ In 1931, in response to the depression, the Aria Company in Northern Taranaki altered the terms on three soldier settlers' orders; two of the soldiers in question were also directors of the Company. The local Member explained to the Minister that this was done because of the low price being received for butter, 6d per pound. The financial position of the Company was tenuous, with approximately £9500 outstanding on stock and chattels security and it had no security over debts with soldier settlers because the Department controlled all the securities. The local Member had observed that the only place many of the settlers could obtain credit was the factory store.⁸⁵ The position was finely balanced, with both the soldier settler suppliers and the companies being in a dependent position *vis-à-vis* each other. In the circumstances the Government provided help by reducing the percentage of orders, thus freeing some capital for the soldiers to meet

⁸³ Various letters from the Murchison Co-Operative Dairy Factory to the Undersecretary for Lands and the Minister between 7 December 1926 and 14 July 1927, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

⁸⁴ R.J.M. Hill noted in his thesis on the dairy industry: 'Although the dairy industry assumed national importance, in spirit it remained bound by local loyalties for dairy factories were more than their name implied: they were also the commercial foci for their districts, symbols of shared endeavour within small communities', R.J.M. Hill, 'The Quest for Control: The New Zealand Dairy Industry and the Guaranteed Price, 1921-1936', MA thesis in History, Auckland University, 1974, p.16.

⁸⁵ Letter from W.J. Broadfoot, United Member for Waitomo, to the Minister of Lands, 18 March 1931, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

some of their debts to the company. Despite the Minister's efforts, the Aria company continued to refuse to pay on orders. It was joined by the Pio Pio and Kaiteke companies, although Pio Pio was willing to discuss the issue and informed the Commissioner that 'where a surplus arose, between what the supplier earned and the amount he spent in the company trading department, it would be credited to the Department but not where a debit occurred'.⁸⁶

With the collapse of prices in the early 'thirties, the position of small farmers relying entirely on dairying became intolerable and assistance was sought from the Government. Early in 1931 five soldiers from Otakiri, Bay of Plenty, wrote to the Minister requesting that their cream-cheque orders be suspended for the remainder of the season as their dairy statements were showing debit balances, leaving them nothing with which to buy food and clothing.⁸⁷ In response to the depression, the Minister of Lands decided in 1932 that in the interests of other creditors the Department, existing cream cheque-orders would be reduced to 33 1/3 percent in cases where the total proceeds had been retained to meet set charges.

Commissioners were instructed to see that the Department ensured that soldier settlers had command of sufficient resources to meet living and maintenance costs.⁸⁸ This meshed with the institution of budgeting control.

Notwithstanding the statements by the Minister and the Department, the issue remained contentious for rural interests in Taranaki where the concentration of soldier settlers in some companies' catchment areas encouraged strong stands against the Department's policy. The Commissioner for Southland also complained that the Department was losing money because the companies were operating on net proceeds after various requisites had been supplied to the settler, while some mortgagors were making and selling homemade butter, or supplying two or more

⁸⁶ Letter from the Pio Pio Dairy Company to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Taranaki, 19 June 1933, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

⁸⁷ Letter from the soldiers to the Minister of Lands, 2 January 1931, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

⁸⁸ Department of Lands and Survey circular 328, 18 March 1932, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

factories with milk while the cream-cheque order was operative on only one factory.⁸⁹

Government plans to supervise soldier settlers had mixed success. From any perspective it appeared that the supervisors were too few to adequately meet the needs and demands of both soldiers and the Government. Yet their appointment did indicate an awareness on the part of the Government that the pioneer model of settlement was no longer sufficient to establish inexperienced men on the land. An unanswered question is the extent to which soldier settlers were willing to accept advice from officials representing a financially demanding government, rather than from experienced local farmers. The soldiers were faced with what appeared to be harsh demands by the Department of Lands for both their compliance with official instructions and the material fruit of their labours. Many of the soldiers were not given significant opportunity to control their affairs and although this worked to safeguard them during difficult financial times they were, for all intents and purposes, working for the Government as farm managers and receiving little return. If the soldiers were motivated by their war experience to look to the land for a life-style which offered personal freedom, independence and a closeness to nature distant from the industrial mechanistic, and dehumanising environment of modern war, they were to be sadly disappointed. Their farming ventures had not allowed them to escape the odium of dependence, despite providing a degree of security unavailable to civilian mortgagors.

⁸⁹ Commissioner of Crown Lands, Southland, to the Undersecretary for Lands, 23 November 1933, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

HOPE DEFERRED

This section investigates the position of the soldier settlers in the period from the 1921 depression through to the Second World War and argues that, in financial terms, the soldier settlers were generally treated leniently by the Department of Lands and Survey. This was often at the price of the soldiers' functional farming independence, which increased the already marked sense of their financial dependence upon the Department of Lands. The period is characterised by the drop in commodity prices in 1921 followed by fluctuating and uncertain prices leading to the depression of the 1930s, and government responses to the calls for assistance from the soldiers and the rural community. The soldiers, although benefiting generally from various government policies designed to enhance the position of the rural producer and the country as a whole, appeared more susceptible to fluctuations in commodity prices than the average producer. Because the Government intervened to adjust the values of soldiers' land and intercede in the soldiers' mortgage contracts, the settlers had greater difficulty obtaining seasonal finance from commercial sources, and refinancing their flat mortgages when many of these came up for renewal in the later 1920s. A change in the Department of Land's attitude towards the scheme and the soldiers is discernible through the period. This change reflected recognition that the soldier settlement scheme had some inherent structural flaws, and the influx of a new breed of administrators imbued with ideals of scientific and financial efficiency.

CHAPTER 12

DEPRESSION AND RESPONSE

The most significant factor to impact adversely upon the soldier settlement scheme was the 1921 depression, and it was this event more than any other which had the effect of fundamentally changing the administrative direction and image of the scheme. The depression came as shock to inexperienced settlers and their subsequent vociferous claims for relief were taken up by the Liberal party and used in its attack upon Massey and Reform. The politicising of the issue forced the Government into a defensive posture and it responded with a series of ameliorative measures designed to assist the soldier settlers but which, in the longer term, ensured that soldier settlers would be viewed by the community as a group betrayed and their status as victims firmly established.

Chapter 10 argued that there were structural and administrative problems associated with the scheme as it developed from Massey's 'experiment' of 1915 through to settling nearly 10,000 men on the land by the end of 1920. The problems as outlined related to the provision of materials, stock, roading, training and advice, and the issue of what constituted 'sufficient capital' to start farming. It can be argued that these problems were to be expected. This, at least, was the view of the Department of Lands and Survey. The slump in commodity prices also brought complaints from the soldier settlers as to the size of sections, their subdivision, and valuation. The soldiers' perception of their position was uncompromising and the destruction of their hopes after the post-war period, described by Burdon as the 'false morning', was seen as a betrayal. It had been a period when the soldier settlers had expected that, despite establishment problems, their future prospects as farmers would be reasonable and that they could look forward to their 'reward for service' in the form of a rural competency.

The initial government response to the depression was to deny that there were any major problems with the scheme and that temporary measures, such as postponement and remission of rent and arrears of charges and further injection of

a little capital, would be sufficient to carry most of the settlers through the period of depressed prices. The subsequent period of inconsistent commodity prices and the continuing calls for assistance from soldier settlers short of funds forced the Government to undertake a nation-wide investigation of the financial positions of individual soldier settlers. Although the findings of these Enquiry Boards varied, the consensus was that revaluation of soldier farms would have to take place sooner rather than later.

The wartime and immediate post-war rural business environment was characterised by a booming land market and related activities of stock-dealing, and sales of 'modern' equipment and plant that 'all progressive farmers had to have'. The stock and station companies encouraged speculation in farms and helped many soldier settlers with development finance beyond that provided by the Government. When the prices for primary commodities slumped after the termination of the wartime commandeering, the soldiers, along with many other recent land purchasers, were left with outgoings for rent, debt servicing, and loan repayments that could not be met from farm income. Meat and wool farmers were struck first by the declining returns, followed a season later by dairy producers.¹ By 1921 the economic position for most of the soldier settlers was particularly perilous, as few had enjoyed the benefit of the good returns during and immediately after the war. The reaction of the Massey Government to falling commodity prices was to slash its costs by introducing stringent restrictions on the employment of civil servants and to cut the pay of those who remained,² to reduce the money supply and generally to screw down the economy. The position of the nation's finances might well have been worse but for the good fortune that not all commodity prices fell simultaneously. Rapid increase in dairy production had also outweighed to some degree the drop in prices.³

¹ The position of dairy products had been helped by a northern hemisphere drought, but this good fortune was not capitalised upon by New Zealand companies and by August 1921 the position for dairy farmers looked bleak.

² Brodrick used this as an opportunity to rid himself of some inefficient officers, Brodrick diary, 6 September 1921, WTU.

³ *Round Table*, June 1922, p.678.

Chapman has observed that the two groups who escaped this general retrenchment were the stock and station agents, and the soldier settlers.⁴ A moratorium protected the stock companies from a run on their deposit funds, so that they would be in a position to carry the farming community until prices and land values stabilised.⁵

The immediate response of soldier settlers and RSA to the slump was a chorus of calls for remission of rents and accumulated arrears, revaluation of land, and an increase in development capital available on current account. The soldiers were, in many cases, without any financial resources for day-to-day needs. In Nelson, a combined meeting of the Patriotic Society, Repatriation Committee, and the RSA called upon the Government to give immediate relief so that the soldiers - described as being of the very best type, capable, conscientious and energetic - would not leave the land.⁶ In April 1921, Massey promised to help soldiers who were in difficulty.⁷ As the impact of the depression was increasingly felt by the soldiers towards the end of 1921 and early 1922, the soldier settlers in the Manawatu region called upon the Government for a revaluation and remission of rents. They suggested that where soldier farms were profitable, their owners should be appointed temporary managers for the Crown and paid subsistence grants of £2 per week for married men and £1 for single men.⁸

The position of soldier settlers was not consistent across the country and, while the pastoral farmers running sheep were suffering early in 1921, dairy farmers were

⁴ Robert Chapman, *The Political Scene 1919-1931*, Auckland, 1969, p.13.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ L&S file 26/1-9, NA.

⁷ *Dominion*, 26 September 1921, clipping on L&S file 26/1-9, NA.

⁸ *Press*, 28 February 1922, p.6; The Manawatu settlers repeated their request in an interview with Massey, *Dominion*, 15 April 1922. The Department's policy in the 1930s resembled this suggestion to a remarkable degree.

able to continue with stable prices.⁹ As an indication of the continuing confidence in dairying, the Almadale settlement near Feilding was opened up for ballot in July 1921, and 47 soldiers applied for the nine available sections. The Commissioner indicated that this reflected the high demand in the Wellington Land District for good dairying land.¹⁰ The position of the soldier settlers who relied upon wool production was relieved to some extent by the Government's decision to release the year's wool production from Bills of Sale which had been applied to protect current account advances made to soldiers for development purposes. This allowed the soldiers to deal with wool-brokers for advances on anticipated returns, and so receive some income to meet immediate expenses.¹¹ The Department was critical of the business behaviour of some stock and station agents whom, it was claimed, used the freeing up of wool to trade with the settlers in the 'normal' way and sell them unnecessary plant and material.¹²

The perilous position of the economy, and more particularly the soldier settlers, forced the Government to introduce legislative measures to safeguard the position of the soldiers and its own political credibility, and it counselled patience while its remedial legislation took effect. This took two forms, both of which indicated unwillingness in official circles to publicly admit the seriousness of the immediate depression on the soldiers, and the longer-term structural problems inherent in the scheme.¹³ In private Brodrick noted that Guthrie was 'very much worried by the

⁹ The issue of generalising about the income of dairy farmers requires further investigation as individual dairy companies were responsible for marketing their production and arrangements were not always in the best interests of the companies' suppliers.

¹⁰ Memo from McClure to Brodrick, July 1921, L&S file 26/5/35, NA. The applicants commanded cash resources ranging from £132 to £466 pounds and McClure thought the successful applicants would do well.

¹¹ On 15 February 1922 Brodrick informed McClure to release some of the wool proceeds to the settlers on the Tukurumuri settlement near Martinborough for specific sustenance and improvement purposes. Brodrick observed 'from an interview I had with the men... I gather that they cannot carry on without relief being granted'. Brodrick's son was a soldier settler on this block. Memo from Brodrick to McClure 15 February 1922, L&S file 21/218, NA.

¹² Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1921, p.7.

¹³ By the middle of 1921 Guthrie was considering legislation to realise the Crown's interest in soldier farms, L&S file 26/1-9, NA. Brodrick was doubtful as to the viability of continuing the policy of restricting transfers of soldier farms and urban houses only to soldier settlers. He

difficulty of making a number of the soldier settlers succeed and so am I as a matter of fact'.¹⁴ The Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act 1921 was primarily concerned with the disposal of soldier farms that reverted to the Government as mortgagee.¹⁵ The Act also allowed those soldiers who had taken up Crown sections on deferred payment licence to exchange these for renewable leases, thus reducing their immediate outgoings. More significantly, the Act allowed a postponement of up to three years on mortgage payments for section 2 settlers.¹⁶

The debate over the 1921 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Bill provided the opposition with an ideal opportunity to voice its criticism of the Reform Government's land purchase policy. The leader of the Liberal party, T.M. Wilford, claimed that the introduction of the Bill was the first public utterance by the Minister of Lands admitting failure of the Government's land settlement scheme for soldiers.¹⁷ Reform was defended by J.G. Coates, Minister of Public Works. Because of the tenuous political position of the Reform Government, the debate on the Bill was more to do with scoring political points over responsibility for the past land policy of the wartime National Government, than alleviating the present plight of the soldier settlers.¹⁸

informed Cabinet that 'the question has got to be faced as to whether the Government has not done its utmost to help these soldiers, and if they fail to take advantage of the opportunities given them whether the Government should make further losses'. L&S file 13/25, NA.

¹⁴ Brodrick diary, 9 July 1921, WTU.

¹⁵ In response to newspaper criticism that neither soldiers nor civilians would take over the full loading of charges on farms that reverted to the Crown, Brodrick informed Guthrie: 'the Crown's advances in many cases are less than the present value of the land and that second and even third mortgagees are bound to buy out the Crown's first mortgage to protect themselves.... Failure has been more often the fault of the individual than the excessive price he has had to pay for his land', minute from Brodrick to Guthrie, on clipping of *Northern Advocate*, 21 January 1922, L&S file 13/25, NA.

¹⁶ Jourdain, *History of Land Legislation*, p.193. The Land Boards already had power to recommend postponement or remission of current rent payments and accumulated arrears for Crown tenants.

¹⁷ *NZPD*, 30 January 1922, p.818.

¹⁸ Parliament met during August 1921 and the session was notable for the lengthy confidence debates that took place.

The debate also raised the issue of quantifying the degree of 'failure' of individual farmers, a subject on which contemporaries were generally ill-informed. Both Guthrie and Coates used forfeiture figures to show the low number of 'failures', while using the moral claim of the soldiers upon the community as a justification for the policies pursued.¹⁹ Opposition members claimed that the Minister was misleading the House, and that the true failure rate was higher than indicated by the forfeiture figures. Earlier, the *Southland Times* had observed that 'in normal times we were entitled to expect a proportion of failures among a crowd of men going on the land and with prices very much below the level at which these men went onto their holdings a greater number of failures would not be unexpected'.²⁰ In March 1922, Guthrie had quoted official figures to *Quick March*, showing that from 3,588 soldier leases there had been 291 forfeitures, 19 foreclosures, 60 abandonments of section 2 properties, and 617 transfers of properties subject to mortgages under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act.²¹ These figures indicated that a greater number of soldiers had left the land than indicated by the forfeiture figures quoted by Guthrie in the House.

The soldiers' call for relief was not an isolated one in the rural sector and coincided with those of the farming community in general.²² Some farming groups, especially the Dairy Farmers' Union, called for action to write down the value of mortgages in line with current land and produce prices. The Government

¹⁹ The number of forfeitures was quoted as sixty, but this did not allow for the number of surrenders, foreclosures, and abandoned farms, nor for the number of approved transfers. See chapter 15 below for a discussion on the nature of failure.

²⁰ *Southland Times*, 29 September 1921, clipping on L&S file 26/1-8, NA.

²¹ Guthrie made no comment on the number of Crown properties that were voluntarily surrendered. However, surrender may not have been seen as a failure, but rather a personal decision by the soldier settler to leave the land without duress.

²² Evidence for regional variation in economic response to the depression is provided by a report appearing in the *Farmers Union Advocate*, 5 August 1922, p.13. A Southland farmer was quoted as saying, 'Southland was affected little, if any, by the boom a year or two ago, and whilst values had collapsed in the North, the South was pursuing the even tenor of its way. The farmers as a whole down there were weathering the storm of lower prices well, and nowhere had he heard any comment on the hard times. In the North, as far as he could see, it was just the reverse, the wail of the farmer being heard far and wide. He thought too much was being made of the farmers' hardships'.

decided in February 1922 to have the Valuer-General investigate the financial difficulties of dairy farmers in various parts of the country to facilitate voluntary agreements between mortgagors and mortgagees. This added fuel to the soldier's claims for some decisive action.²³ In a letter to the *New Zealand Herald*, 'A Victim' claimed:

it is confidently believed by returned soldiers that public opinion would support any reasonable sacrifice by the State which enables returned soldiers to remain on their holdings, it not being credited that public gratitude could in so short a space of time forget what the country owes to the men who took an active part in the Great War.²⁴

The RSA initially demanded that the Government give 'sympathetic and generous treatment' to the soldier settlers on the grounds that the community had had the benefit of the war years' prices and the soldiers had not.²⁵ As the depression deepened, the Association's attitude became more restrained. The 1922 Dominion Conference emphasised the moral responsibility of all soldier settlers to attempt to carry out all their obligations 'so that the highest confidence may exist between the settler as tenant and the Crown as landlord'.²⁶ The RSA also agreed with the Department of Lands that the time was opportune for 'removing the incurable malcontent and the man who shows no aptitude for farming'.²⁷ At least one soldier settler took exception to the position of the RSA, claiming that 'every

²³ Financial Statement in the Committee of Supply by W.F. Massey, Minister of Finance, *AJHR*, B.6, 15 August 1922, p.37: The *Taumarunui Press*, 21 March 1922, reported that the scheme, proposed by the Dairy Farmers' Union, did not find favour with the Te Kuiti Chamber of Commerce and that a member had complained: 'the Valuer-General cannot possibly do any good, and the credit of the Waikato has sustained a very serious blow by all the noise about bankrupt farmers', clipping on L&S file 26/1-8, NA.

²⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, 7 March 1922, clipping on L&S file 26/1-8, NA.

²⁵ Letter from the General-Secretary, RSA, to the Minister of Lands, 27 July 1921, L&S file 26/274, NA. A group of soldiers had complained that their local store would no longer carry them during the depression. The RSA suggested to the Government that where approved settlers were farming well, and were of good character, they should have their store account guaranteed up to the amount necessary for their families' maintenance, and in the absence of satisfactory returns for produce a monthly sum to be advanced for other living expenses.

²⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 12 June 1922, clipping on L&S file, 26/1-8, NA.

²⁷ *ibid.*

soldier settler makes an earnest endeavour to meet his obligations, as he has his own money in his farm, but it is beyond the ability of any human to carry out an obligation which amounts to an impossibility'.²⁸

In an editorial in 1922, *Quick March* deviated from the earlier RSA position, when it described the soldier settlers as belonging to four different categories, varying from those that were doing well, those doing well but needing some assistance, those suffering special hardships, and those soldiers 'who are getting deeper and deeper into the mire and perhaps keeping better men out'. The magazine went on to say that 'the present time is really a purifying period: The duds must go to make room for better men'.²⁹ It was significant that *Quick March* should have broken the unity of servicemen to recognise different degrees of deservedness amongst the soldiers. This corresponds with Wootton's claim that the frontline issues for the British returned soldiers during the immediate post-war period gave way to more specific class-oriented ones, and it may be that in the New Zealand case the soldier settlers' interests had diverged from those of other returned soldiers.³⁰ They had become a sub-group of returned soldiers and within the group there both more and less deserving individuals.³¹

This change in attitude might be explained by the soldiers no longer having total confidence in their moral position regarding their special deservedness, particularly while many other sectors of the community were suffering during the depression. Editorials in the *Quick March* echoed this theme, but also emphasised that the soldiers needed some long-term relief from the problem of overvalued land.³² Postponement of rent was not seen as the answer because, as *Quick March*

²⁸ Letter to the Editor, *Press*, 12 June 1923, clipping on L&S file 26/1-10, NA.

²⁹ *Quick March*, 10 March 1922, p.28.

³⁰ Wootton, *The Politics of Influence*, pp.257-258.

³¹ This coincided with the line of argument sustained by the Department of Lands that each individual case had to be assessed on its merits.

³² *Quick March*, 10 January 1922, p.28. The *Quick March* also observed that the soldiers were not going to let the public forget that they [the soldiers] had not had the benefit of the good years because they had been away fighting the war.

observed, 'the accumulated load hangs like a mill-stone around the farmer's neck and drags him down'.³³ The soldiers were portrayed as being victims of circumstance. The catch cry was 'through no fault of their own'. To a degree this was accepted by the Government, and in late 1922 Guthrie informed the House:

in the case of soldiers whose interest in their sections was forfeited owing to non-compliance with the conditions of their lease, or who voluntarily surrendered them... and they had "played the game," they were never followed up.... Honourable members had no need to fear that there would be any harsh treatment meted out to those who made an honest effort to get on.³⁴

In an attempt to gain public sympathy for the soldier settlers' position, *Quick March* interviewed soldiers in the Wairarapa. The attributes and description of these men harked back to wartime, and they were described as 'hard workers bent on making good. They did not object to working seventeen hours a day.... Taken all round, the men encountered were well educated, strongly built and keen'.³⁵ Men endowed with such attributes were hardly likely to fail because of their own shortcomings. As A.K. Newman told the House in 1922, 'they had done their duty at the war and if they were in bankruptcy now that was through no fault of their own'.³⁶ The relationship between war service and current financial difficulties was clearly being made.

Public pressure notwithstanding, the need to protect the State's investment in soldiers' farms saw the Land Boards and the Undersecretary continue to press the soldier settlers to meet their financial commitments. There was an expectation that the depression in prices would evaporate once stocks held by the Imperial Government had been disposed of and shipping problems had been overcome. With this in mind, Guthrie was unwilling to indulge in a blanket writing-down of soldiers' obligations. He stressed that soldier settlers were lucky compared with

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ *NZPD*, 8 September 1922, p.1049.

³⁵ *Quick March*, 10 January 1922, p.30.

³⁶ *NZPD*, 8 September 1922, p.1048.

other farmers in that they had the Government to fall back on. At the same time the Government expected soldiers to continue to try their best to meet their commitments.³⁷ Guthrie cautioned them: 'we are not going to say to [the soldiers] "you need not do anything; you need not try; we are not going to make any charge upon you"'.³⁸ In August 1921, the various Commissioners were instructed to encourage those soldiers who were 'good hard working settlers' to stay on their farms. This was to be done by transferring up to £250 of each soldier's current account advance into an instalment mortgage and re-advancing the £250 to the soldier on current account to compensate for improvements. The intention was to allow the soldier to meet pressing private debts. Section 2 settlers also received this consideration on their current accounts, although negotiations were required with other mortgagees to give the new government instalment mortgage priority over second and third mortgagees. Financial incentives were also offered for settlers to maintain or increase their stock numbers, an important consideration in the face of the actions of the restrictions imposed by stock firms. However, the over-riding factor remained the soldiers' personal virtue and, as Brodrick informed the Commissioners, 'the personal element should be an important factor in deciding whether additional assistance should be given'.³⁹

The proposal to alleviate the immediate financial plight of many soldier settlers by making more funds available to them did not, however, find favour throughout the community. The *Waikato Times* was concerned that further help to soldier settlers at the expense of the taxpayer, through a suggested increase in the current advance from £750, would not appeal to the genuine strugglers who would be loath to

³⁷ *ibid.*, 30 January 1922, p.844.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Lands and Survey Department Circular 1618, 5 August 1921, L&S file 26/274, NA. The Commissioner for the Auckland District replied that where the soldiers were in a very constrained financial position and with little equity in their properties it would be most difficult to proceed with improvements in advance of receipt of the extra assistance. He also pointed out that the soldiers were unable to finance improvements from outside sources and 'therefore a soldier settler must necessarily be dependent upon such assistance as the Department can provide'. In reply Brodrick reiterated that the assistance should only go to 'hardworking industrious settlers who by their energies increase the respective values of their properties', Memo from Skeet to Brodrick, 12 August 1921, and reply, 23 August 1921, L&S file 26/274, NA.

increase their commitments during the uncertain economic times. The paper claimed that 'it is the waster to whom further advances will appeal'. This policy was introduced by regulation and the paper considered it 'an inauspicious commencement of a session which is to be devoted to the consideration of methods of economy'.⁴⁰ The *Press* reported comments of the Vice-President of the Farmers' Union Trading Company, who claimed that it was not the high cost of land that was causing the farmers' problems but rather the high cost of production, freight and taxation. He argued that

the evil could not be cured by allowing a few fools who paid ridiculous prices to repudiate their debts. A man who buys foolishly must, irrespective of his calling, abide by his bargain and not expect the Government to save him from his folly.⁴¹

The *Southland Times* was more charitable to the soldiers and observed 'the Minister of Lands referred to the fact that the actual deficit up to August 31 was £10,000 but the country would not grudge a loss of ten times that amount so long as it was sure that the soldier settlers were being generously treated'.⁴² The paper was not to know just how prophetic its comments would prove to be. *Quick March* reported that Mr Hope Gibbons, the Wanganui representative of the Federation of New Zealand Patriotic and War Relief Societies, wanted the soldier settlers to be given work on the roads rather than further loans of public money.⁴³

The ongoing problem of distinguishing among classes of soldier settlers was again brought to the public attention by the comments of the RSA and newspapers in response to the depression. Although the Department of Lands had been operating throughout the scheme on the premise that each case had to be dealt with on its merits, public opinion had tended to consider the soldier settlers as a group. The

⁴⁰ *Waikato Times*, 26 September 1921, clipping on L&S file 26/1-9, NA.

⁴¹ *Press*, 17 February 1922, p.8.

⁴² *Southland Times*, 29 September 1921, clipping on L&S file 26/1-9, NA.

⁴³ *Quick March*, 10 September 1921, p.17.

Department nevertheless did make allowances for different types of farms in its depression response. For example, dairy-farming soldier settlers were expected to meet their obligations to the Department, while meat and wool farmers were given extra consideration. Although some soldiers appeared able to pay their rent and outgoings, they were reluctant to do so when there was talk of postponements and remissions in the air.⁴⁴ The Wellington Crown Lands Ranger complained to the Land Board that men on the Putorino settlement should have been able to meet their commitments, provided they were 'careful and cautious in all their expenditure.... Dairying has suffered no slump and the men on Putorino have had excellent returns for their butter fat'.⁴⁵ The settlers on the Cloverlea and Kairanga settlements near Palmerston North, were not as fortunate as the Putorino men in that the Kairanga Dairy Company failed to pay the usual end-of-season bonus. The Ranger reported in this case that 'only by firm handling will we get our rent in'.⁴⁶ In October 1921 McClure reported that some of the soldier dairy farmers in the Eketahuna area who were supplying a loss-making cheese factory were behind in their rent, while 'others are paying their way but all of them are under strict supervision and any failure to act up to instructions will be immediately dealt with'.⁴⁷

In November 1921 the Cabinet decided to insist that soldiers who were able were to begin making repayments on their current account advances. This decision was taken in the belief that many soldier settlers were by then well-established and had been receiving good returns. Brodrick wanted this action targeted only at soldiers in good financial positions and he instructed the Commissioners that

⁴⁴ Guthrie informed the House: 'there were men who could pay but refused because others were being let off the hook', *Dominion*, 8 December 1921. Not all dairy farmers could be lumped in together and, as the *Auckland Star* observed in September 1921, the Dairy farmers in the Auckland land district did not have to contend with the drought that had severely affected the lower North Island. This type of environmental situation added support for a regional administration of the scheme through the Land Boards who were in touch with local conditions.

⁴⁵ Wellington Land Board minutes, 28 September 1921, L&S-W, 12/22, NA.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Memo from McClure to Brodrick, 7 October 1921, L&S file 26/274, NA.

'arrangements... must be conducted with circumspection and without undue severity'.⁴⁸

These 'arrangements' consisted for the most part of an increase in the amount of the cream-cheque orders which the Department held against the production of the farms.⁴⁹ The *Manawatu Evening Standard* called the policy 'a gross injustice' and took exception to the Department demanding that the dairy companies pay over 50 per cent of the settlers' income. The paper claimed that this would 'reduce the war veterans to a state of abject serfdom'.⁵⁰ Guthrie was seen by the paper as being ruled by the Department of Lands, and a statement was demanded from him defining his position and indicating that he had ordered the Department to desist in its demands upon the settlers.⁵¹ The *Manawatu Daily Times* described the policy of treatment for dairy-farming soldier settlers as the action of 'an avaricious Department'.⁵² One particular Manawatu case in 1921 led to extensive coverage in the press throughout the country and questions being raised in the House. The settler, who farmed at Whakarongo, had a 75 per cent order imposed upon his cream-cheque. The local RSA brought the matter to the attention of the *Manawatu Daily Times*, which stated that the Government was showing a callous disregard for the welfare of the soldier settlers. The Department, on the other hand, claimed that a prior order of 25 per cent had not been cancelled by the settler upon the imposition of a subsequent 50 per cent order.⁵³ In response to this case, McClure outlined to Brodrick the policy of the Wellington Land Board, which was to request an order of 25 per cent where the soldier settler was making an honest attempt to meet his obligations, and a 50 per cent order 'in cases where the settler does not recognise his responsibilities'.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Department of Lands and Survey circular 1654, 8 November 1921, L&S file 26/274, NA.

⁴⁹ See Chapter 11 above, for a fuller explanation of the workings of cream-cheque orders.

⁵⁰ *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 26 November 1921, clipping on L&S file 26/1-8, NA.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² *Manawatu Daily Times*, 25 November 1921, clipping on L&S file 26/1-8, NA.

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Memo from McClure to Brodrick, 1 December 1921, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

Concerned at the political repercussions of this case, Guthrie instructed the Department to desist from taking 50 per cent orders in all but the most exceptional circumstances. Although not circumventing the Minister's specific instruction, but certainly disregarding its spirit, Brodrick advised Commissioners that they could have their Supervisors of Soldier Settlements obtain orders in excess of 50 per cent, in anticipation of the Minister approving the larger amount.⁵⁵

It was not only the meeting of commitments to the Government that was stretching the financial resources of the soldiers. In many cases the stock firms, which had provided funding for stock and chattels, mainly to section 2 settlers, responded to the depression by 'closing down' on the settlers to reduce debt and holding all proceeds of sales, including dairy-cheque orders up to 100 per cent. A Department of Land's inspector operating in the Canterbury Land District was particularly scathing of the tactics of one company, which was keeping all proceeds, and also declining further advances to the soldiers, leading to a position where it was, according to the inspector, 'only a matter of time when the settler will find himself with the farm and no stock'.⁵⁶ The inspector stated that he thought the stock firms were pursuing this policy in the hope of forcing the Crown to take over the accounts.⁵⁷ As a result of these tactics, soldier settlers described as 'first class' farmers by the inspector found themselves unable to continue operations and, despite the willingness of the Department to help out, the available current account advance of £750 was generally found to be insufficient to cover the stock firms' debt.

Ironically, the stock companies themselves were approaching Guthrie for the development of a scheme which would assist the soldier settlers meet their

⁵⁵ Memo from Brodrick to all Commissioners, 9 December 1921, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

⁵⁶ Confidential memo from Inspector Robertson to Brodrick, 19 April 1921, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

commitments to the firms involved.⁵⁸ Despite being in line with general government policy, Brodrick expressed concern at this development because, he suggested, it would hinder plans to increase the amount of capital available to the settlers on current account. He informed Guthrie that 'the result would be that the Crown would have to buy out all private interests and shoulder the whole responsibility as there is not the smallest doubt that the business firms would close down on their clients at once with the view of minimising their losses'.⁵⁹ One particular idea of Brodrick's to help out financially embarrassed soldiers gives an indication of the barrenness of ideas within the upper levels of Departmental administration. He suggested that where soldiers were in difficult positions with their creditors, they 'should seek the protection of the Bankruptcy Court after which we might reinstate him and restock at present prices within the £750'.⁶⁰ Brodrick seemed to take little account of the social stigma that attached to bankrupts.

An alternative view in support of the role of the stock firms during this period was provided by A.W. Jamieson, the retiring Chairman of the Canterbury District Repatriation Board. He observed that the firms were a crucial agent in the soldier settlement scheme because of the limited amount of government capital available to the soldiers. He noted that when the depression arrived and things got tough, 'the firms stuck to the men and avoided untold loss to the Government, men, and themselves'.⁶¹

Despite the position of soldier settlers appearing perilous, a survey in late 1921 and early 1922 by the RSA of 31 larger soldier settlements on Crown Land revealed that, on the whole, soldiers were 'progressing as favourably as can be expected with fluctuating markets and are receiving considerate treatment from the Lands

⁵⁸ Letter from the Secretary of The New Zealand Farmers' Co-operative Association of Canterbury Limited, to Guthrie, 8 June 1921, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

⁵⁹ Memo from Brodrick to Guthrie, 23 June 1921, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ *Lyttelton Daily Times*, 22 May 1924, clipping on L&S file 26/274/6, NA.

Department'.⁶² Replies to the survey revealed the concerns of soldier settlers on Crown Land. These varied from issues to do with sliding scales of rent, limiting cream-cheque orders to a maximum of 25 per cent, revaluation for rating purposes, and instituting a more democratic way of setting up Land Boards. Some of the settlers felt their treatment had been fair, although the economic outlook was grim. In light of the observations made about the Wellington and Hawkes Bay Land Boards in chapter 9, the comments made by settlers from these districts are revealing. For example, the Kopane settlers claimed that the 'Wellington Lands Department was not wholly in sympathy with soldier settlers', while the Tiraumea settlers claimed that the 'Commissioner of Crown Lands [McClure] bears a grudge'. Hawkes Bay settlers, in contrast to their complaints during the settlement phase, consistently praised the treatment they had received from Marsh and the Land Board. The soldiers from Dipton settlement in Southland claimed they were 'just slaves to the Government', while the Otautau settlers, also in Southland, claimed that they had a 'very considerate Commissioner'.⁶³ The two comments from Southland are not mutually exclusive, and the soldiers may well have perceived the local land administration in a positive light as compared with 'the Government' in Wellington.

Guthrie responded to the findings of the *Quick March* survey early in 1922 and reiterated his Department's view of revaluation during a slump period:

The Government recognises the disastrous effects of the slump by treating the settlers in the most generous and effective manner, so supporting them through the bad times.... It protects the interests of the taxpayers by insisting that all applications for postponements are made by individuals and not by wholesale petition, and by resisting applications for revaluations at a time when no one can estimate what is a fair value for land. A revaluation and reduction at the present time would inevitably create a saleable goodwill, and would, therefore be against the interests of sound settlement.⁶⁴

⁶² *Quick March*, 10 March 1922, p.37; *Press*, 21 February 1922, p.6.

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Quick March*, 10 March 1922, p.39.

Guthrie had earlier commented that if the Government offered wholesale revaluations of soldiers' properties it 'would have a very bad moral effect and tend to weaken their efforts to make good.... It cannot hurt any soldier to wait... for they are treated with the greatest leniency and consideration'.⁶⁵

Soldiers also had to have been in possession of their properties for a minimum of three years before being eligible for revaluation.⁶⁶

The public perception of the position of the soldiers during the slump is difficult to ascertain. Partisan newspapers on both sides of the political spectrum were making wildly conflicting statements. The *Wairarapa Age* observed that the soldier settlers 'are lucky men, and on the whole they show their appreciation of the chance they have been given. It is not from them that the wail about their condition is coming'.⁶⁷ The pro-Liberal *Lyttelton Daily Times*, on the other hand, claimed that the position of the Crown settlers was 'a powerful indictment of the Government's land purchase policy' and that the net result was that 'the taxpayer must help the soldiers out of their difficulties by postponements and remission of rent'.⁶⁸ The pro-Reform *Press* reported in March 1922 that the number of failures was slowly increasing and that 'a large number of soldier settlers are financially embarrassed, but are being encouraged to hold on by the sympathetic attitude of the Lands Department and by the improvement in the prices of produce'.⁶⁹ The proceedings of a meeting between Massey and Manawatu settlers received coverage in the *Dominion* on 15 April 1922, and although the soldiers presented balance sheets to show that their farms were barely returning a living, the Prime Minister refused to countenance any further assistance. His claim that the interests of the taxpayer had also to be considered drew a retort from the soldiers that they were entitled to some special consideration compared with ordinary taxpayers and that the whole of the State should take responsibility to ensure the soldiers' success. In a response

⁶⁵ Letter from Guthrie to K.S. Williams, MP, Wellington, 17 October 1921, L&S file 26/274, NA.

⁶⁶ Land Laws Amendment Act 1915 section 15, and section 22 Land Laws Amendment Act, 1920.

⁶⁷ *Wairarapa Age*, 30 September 1921, clipping on L&S file 26/1-9, NA.

⁶⁸ *Lyttelton Daily Times*, 13 October 1921, clipping on L&S file 26/1-9, NA.

⁶⁹ *Press*, 8 March 1922, p.13.

emphasising his own experience during the long depression of the 1880s, Massey told the soldiers: 'you men will look back ten years hence and be glad you stuck to your land and made a success of it'.⁷⁰ Despite a conservative outlook, the *New Zealand Herald* was more concerned with the impact that 'temporary expediences' and the 'mists of uncertainty and insecurity' had on the minds of the men suffering from the effects of war. The paper laid the blame for the position on the Government's land purchase policy.⁷¹ The Eketahuna Chamber of Commerce claimed that Guthrie was 'without knowledge of the facts' when he stated before a meeting of Wairarapa settlers that all was as well as it could be with the soldier settlement scheme.⁷² During the election campaign of 1922, Massey, in defence of the Government's previous land purchase policy, claimed that all the land purchased by the Government for the settlement of soldiers could be resold for a profit.⁷³ This was obviously a damage-control statement.

By mid-1922 calls for the revaluation of soldiers' properties were being heard in many quarters, and the Government began considering ways of dealing equitably with the matter. However, the issue was deliberately clouded so that the Government, with an election to be fought that year, would not be seen as too readily admitting to mistakes in the purchase of estates during the boom period. The 1922 Dominion Conference of the RSA called for revaluation of the soldiers' holdings and a revision of interest and rents in line with ruling prices for the previous 12 years. Adding further pressure was the Farmers' Union, which passed the following motion at its 1922 conference:

that this conference congratulates the Government upon the good treatment that the returned men have received at its hands. We also desire to place on record our admiration of the way the majority of the returned men have made good under adverse circumstances, and request the Government to set up a small commission to go into

⁷⁰ *Dominion*, 15 April 1922, clipping on L&S file 26/1-8, NA.

⁷¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 12 June 1922, clipping on L&S file 26/1-9, NA.

⁷² *Evening Post*, 27 June 1922, clipping on L&S file 26/1-9, NA.

⁷³ *NZPD*, 8 August 1923, p.668.

individual cases of hardship, with a view to their removal, such commission to be assisted by local committees.⁷⁴

In response to calls for revaluation, Guthrie's first policy reaction was to consider setting up regional boards that would report to the Land Boards which would, in turn, report to an 'Advisory Board' in Wellington. Guthrie wanted reliable men appointed to the Boards and rejected a call by the RSA to have special representation.⁷⁵ A further consideration in the appointment of these Enquiry Boards was the impending election in 1922. The Leader of the Opposition had tackled the Minister of Lands on this point and Guthrie had prevaricated. The Eketahuna branch of the Farmers' Union saw the appointment of a 'valuation commission' as election tactics.⁷⁶

While speculation on the Government's approach to the problem of the soldier settlers continued in the press, a special committee of the RSA and the New Zealand Farmers' Union, including General Sir Andrew Russell, President of the RSA, and W.J. Polson, President of the Farmers' Union, formulated a combined approach to the issue.⁷⁷ While the investigative components of the RSA scheme appeared similar to the Government's proposed framework, the soldiers also wanted the Boards to be responsible for revaluation of properties.⁷⁸

The prospect of revaluation did not find favour with two Commissioners. Marsh was concerned that the public pressure for revaluation would push values below the level where the Crown could recover its investment and, he observed, 'neither the Board nor the Commissioner could fairly be blamed for rental and rate arrears -

⁷⁴ *Press*, 29 July 1922, clipping on L&S file 26/1-8, NA.

⁷⁵ *NZPD*, 27 July 1922, pp.753-4.

⁷⁶ *Farmers' Union Advocate*, 5 May 1923, p.11.

⁷⁷ Sir Andrew Russell had commanded the New Zealand Division in France and was, reportedly, highly regarded by the troops under his command. Polson was President of the Farmers' Union. He was elected to Parliament as an Independent for Stratford in 1928. He joined the Coalition in 1931 and became a National Member in 1935. Polson's politics were conservative and Tom Brooking has suggested that his defence of the Soldier Settlement scheme was motivated by his support for Reform, Tom Brooking, 'Agrarian Businessmen Organise'.

⁷⁸ *Quick March*, 10 October 1922, p.21.

goodness knows we tried and tried in many cases to obtain payment, and we could not forfeit'.⁷⁹ T. Brook, who succeeded McClure as Commissioner for the Wellington Land District, expressed concern that the time might not be opportune for the discussion of revaluation, and he observed that 'many of our soldier settlers are talking revaluation in season and out of season, and they are watching for any move on our part that will in any way give support to their demand for it'.⁸⁰

The belated announcement of the appointment of the Enquiry Boards was made by Guthrie on 19 October 1922, less than a month before the election.⁸¹ Two men were appointed to an Enquiry Board in each land district. Guthrie explained that the process had been drawn out because he disregarded anyone who had previously been involved in government land purchases and this had restricted his choice.⁸² Seventeen farmers or retired farmers, a farm manager, a run-holder, two valuers and a merchant represented the experience that was brought to the Boards. Their brief was to generally investigate all facets of the soldier settlement scheme in each land district, discover the percentage of failure, and the reasons for it, and to suggest what assistance should be provided.⁸³ To facilitate the process of

⁷⁹ Memo from Marsh to Thompson, 17 November 1922, L&S file 26/1-9, NA.

⁸⁰ Memo from Brook to Thompson, 22 November 1922, L&S file 26/1-9, NA.

⁸¹ *NZPD*, 19 October 1922, p.345.

⁸² The returned soldiers in Otago objected strongly to one of the appointees, claiming that the man had an interest in an estate sold to the Government for soldier settlement. *NZPD*, 23 October 1922, p.448.

⁸³ Soldier Settlement: Summaries of Reports of Enquiry Boards, *AJHR*, C.9a, Part A, 1923, p.3. The terms of reference for the Enquiry Boards had suggested a number of categories to be used to determine the number of temporary and permanent failures. These were: Unsuitability of subdivision, sections being either too small or too large, or not in keeping with the configuration of the country; excessive rent or high price paid for land; inexperience of farmer, wrong methods of farming, or unsuitability of stock; insufficient working-capital, or the undeveloped or neglected state of the land; high prices ruling for stock at the time of purchase, and subsequent slump, resulting in low prices for produce and stock; high cost of building, fencing material, implements, seeds, and manure at the time of purchase or selection; any other reason. The Boards were also asked to establish the percentage of farms which were presently unprofitably occupied which might have been successful under normal conditions and good management. They were also required to advise on what type of action should be undertaken for two categories of settlers: Those who had proved themselves capable, industrious, and faithful to the observance of their obligations so far as their resources permitted; those settlers who have failed to make the most of their opportunities.

inspection, soldier settlers were provided with forms to state their financial position and these were to be seen by the Board members before inspections occurred.

Whether by design or simply through wishful thinking on the part of the soldiers, the notion emerged that the Boards were actually going to revalue soldiers' properties. Even members of the House spoke of 'the Board which was to revalue soldier-settlement land'.⁸⁴ The Departmental report accompanying the Enquiry Boards' reports also highlighted the belief in the community and amongst the soldier settlers that assistance would be of a general nature and that all settlers would receive some relief.⁸⁵

Notwithstanding this confusion, the position of the soldier settlers during the period of enquiry was officially assured by the Department of Lands, because of concern that a number of soldiers would abandon their farms while awaiting visits from the Enquiry Boards. J.B. Thompson, who had replaced Brodrick as Undersecretary in mid-1922, had informed all the Commissioners that 'until such time as the Government decides on the action to be taken consequent upon the reports of the Enquiry Boards you will please refrain from pressing any settler'.⁸⁶ The pressure and uncertainty faced by the soldiers when 'pressed' was exhibited in a case of a soldier who abandoned his farm on receipt of a notice demanding overdue rent from the Wellington Commissioner.⁸⁷ Guthrie defended the policy of sending out

⁸⁴ *NZPD*, 23 October 1922, p.449.

⁸⁵ Soldier Settlement: Remarks and Recommendations by the Undersecretary for Lands, *AJHR*, C.9a, 1923, Part B, p.33.

⁸⁶ Lands and Survey Accounts Circular No. 96, 14 July 1923, L&S file 26/1-10, NA. J.B. Thompson, previously the Chief Drainage Engineer of the Department of Lands and Survey, had been appointed to the position of Undersecretary in March 1922, and had taken up his duties by mid-year. The departure of Brodrick was significant for the future operations of the soldier settlement scheme. Thompson, who had been appointed ahead of experienced Commissioners such as Skeet from Auckland and McClure of Wellington, had the advantage of not being tainted with involvement in either government land purchase, or soldier settlement administration. In his memoirs, W.R. Jourdain, formerly Chief Clerk of the Department of Lands and Survey, claimed that Thompson owed his appointment to his business experience and that this was a cause of his [Jourdain's] departure from the Department. Jourdain, *Reminiscences of a Civil Servant*, p.14.

⁸⁷ *NZPD*, 6 October 1922, pp.670-71. This case was raised by Colonel Mitchell, Independent Member for Wellington South and Chairman of the RSA Land Committee.

such notices as a matter of business practice, but assured the House that Thompson 'had issued instructions to all the Commissioners that the notices were not to be framed in such drastic and imperative terms as formerly'.⁸⁸

Despite the suggested leniency of the Government, it is apparent (from the evidence) that the continual departure of soldiers from the land was causing grave concern to officials, but primarily because of an administrative concern for the deterioration of the assets and the difficulty of organising reselection, rather than because of any specific concern for the soldiers themselves. The action of 'walking off' was seen by the Auckland Commissioner of Crown Lands as aberrant behaviour, and he complained that 'there are quite a considerable number of cases in which a soldier either walks off his property without giving us any prior notice whatever, or else does so on such short notice that there is insufficient time to make any satisfactory arrangements'.⁸⁹ The available statistics suggest that about 600 soldiers may have abandoned their section 2 properties in the manner described by the Auckland Commissioner. (See chapter 15)

The Enquiry Boards operated from November 1922 through to the middle of 1923, although Guthrie originally wanted their reports by 28 February 1923.⁹⁰ The members of the Boards were accompanied in their inspections either by the local Supervisor of Soldier Settlements or by a Crown Lands Ranger. The results of the Enquiry Boards, including comments by the respective Land Boards, were tabled in the House on 8 August 1923, simultaneously with the second reading of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Bill, an initiative intended to address the problems raised by the Enquiry Boards.⁹¹ The Boards had found that of the

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ Memo from Skeet to Thompson, 16 July 1923, L&S file 13/25-12, NA.

⁹⁰ The Liberal-supporting *Lyttelton Daily Times* on 4 July 1923, took exception to the delay of the Enquiry Board reports and suggested that the news had to be so bad that the Government was deliberately suppressing the information, clipping on L&S file 26/1-10, NA.

⁹¹ It might be suggested that Massey wished to reduce the negative impressions that were expressed in the eleven reports and hoped to cloud the issue by introducing the ameliorative measure at the same moment. The same tactic appears to have been used for the War Pensions Bill which was also debated at the same time. The *Lyttelton Daily Times*, 2 August 1923, claimed 'we fancy that

4,332 farms inspected, 50 per cent were 'successful', 30.5 per cent were 'temporarily unsuccessful' and 18.5 percent had been 'failures'. Some 3,303 soldier settlers eligible for inspection had failed to respond to the Department's letter.⁹² It was assumed by the Boards and the Department that the majority of settlers who did not reply were successful.⁹³ The definition of success was not clearly explained by the Boards. However, the order of reference from the Minister of Lands appointing the Boards required that the Boards give their opinion of the soldier settlers in their district, and laid out specific criteria on ascertaining the failure rate, and the reasons for failure.⁹⁴ Presumably those settlers who did not show the problems being looked for were considered successes.

A review of the reports reveals the degree of regional variation in settlers' experiences. The pattern of regional concerns expressed by the Land Boards in the settlement phase were repeated by the Enquiry Boards, and it was recognised that many of the soldier settlers were suffering financially because of the effects of the 'slump' year. The North Auckland Board found that the information supplied by the soldier settlers to the Board, on forms that had been sent out from the Department of Lands, was 'incomplete and of little service, and in conversation it transpired that few of them understood the nature of the information asked, or its object'.⁹⁵ The experience of the Hawkes Bay Board was similar. In general the Boards were not overly critical of either the soldier settlers' ability as farmers, or the Government's land purchase and settlement policy. Most Boards, with the

some of those Boards must have offered opinions and made recommendations which were distasteful to the Government. Portions of the reports are sure to be withheld from the public, on some pretext or other'.

⁹² The total of 7,635 eligible soldiers refers to the number of farms held by discharged soldiers, including partnerships. For further explanation in the context of the total number of soldiers settled on farms see chapter 15 below.

⁹³ Kizito, 'The Administration of State Land', pp.52-53, quotes an official of the Department of Agriculture who 'intimated' that many of the 3,303 settlers never received their forms or, if they did, were too demoralised to bother replying, or had already abandoned their properties.

⁹⁴ Soldier Settlement: Summaries of Reports of Enquiry Boards, *AJHR*, C.9a, Part A, p.3.

⁹⁵ Soldier Settlement: Remarks and Recommendations by the Undersecretary for Lands, *AJHR*, C.9a, 1923, Part B, p.5. This may be a reflection of either the soldiers' inexperience at producing budgets or simply the poor level of understanding in the farming community in general as to the role of information forecasting future inputs and income.

notable exception of Hawkes Bay, found that too high a price had been paid for settlement land and, in the case of section 2 land, the Auckland Enquiry Board had even suggested that 'the Government had been misled by the parties who were employed as experts to settle the values'.⁹⁶ The Hawkes Bay Board reported:

In our opinion the Government are to be congratulated on the selections made by their Land Purchase Boards, who seem to have been most careful to select the best they could get of what was offering in this district.⁹⁷

However, it was recognised that mistakes had been made and that poorer classes of land, often with worn-out pastures, had been purchased. These lands required high inputs of fertiliser and pasture renewal, something beyond the financial capability of many soldier settlers. The Marlborough Board stated that insufficient supervision had been exercised over the soldier settlers, and the Canterbury Board suggested stricter supervision in the interests of all parties.⁹⁸

In tandem with the Reports of the Enquiry Boards, local Land Boards also furnished critiques of the findings.⁹⁹ Both sets of Boards were in agreement on what the Undersecretary, J.B. Thompson, called 'the principal issue', namely that assistance for the relief of the soldier settlers was necessary.¹⁰⁰ There was, however, an absence of uniformity among the Boards as to what form the assistance should take. Thompson was concerned that to implement the individual recommendations of the Enquiry Board in each district would lead to claims of

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p.6.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.10.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁹ Prior to the submission of the reports the Enquiry Boards had met the respective district Land Boards to compare findings and impressions. J.G. Coates, Minister of Public Works, was reported in the *Waikato Times* to have claimed that the Reports of the Enquiry Boards were 'worthier of attention than that of the Commissioner' because they avoided the personal factor and were not partial or prejudiced. The paper took exception to the inference that the Commissioners could not be impartial and suggested that the personal knowledge of the settlers' 'character and capacity' held by the Commissioners was an important factor in developing the best course of action to follow in each case. *Waikato Times*, 14 August 1923, clipping on L&S file 26/1-10, NA.

¹⁰⁰ Soldier Settlement: Remarks and Recommendations by the Undersecretary for Lands, *AJHR*, C.9a, 1923, Part B, p.32.

dissatisfaction.¹⁰¹ Positive action was required, and he informed Guthrie that 'it is beyond dispute that a number of the soldier farms are over-valued, and revaluation must be faced immediately if the owners of these farms are to be kept on the land'.¹⁰² Thompson was also concerned that to delay revaluation would increase the number of soldiers leaving the land and create a serious problem of deteriorating securities. He proposed a broad policy of revaluation with postponements and further current account advances, which he suggested 'would alleviate the difficulties of all, and not be parochial'.¹⁰³ Despite some Enquiry Boards recommending a general remission of rent arrears, the position of those soldiers who had met their commitments to the Department, often by various means other than farm production, had also to be considered in terms of fairness and equity. The expected cost of implementing the policy was set at £2 million although, as Thompson pointed out, the country was only bound to find the interest on this amount and that, 'the estimated loss can be considered as the Country's quota of repatriation costs under the heading of "soldier settlement"'.¹⁰⁴

The debate on the 1923 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Bill, which was intended to provide the legal framework for the revaluation process, reportedly received a mixed reception from the Auckland and Dunedin branches of the RSA. This may, in part, be explained by the fact that the War Pensions Amendment Bill was also progressing through the Legislature at the same time and criticism of this might have attached to the relief measure for soldier settlers. An editorial in the *Press* noted that the soldiers' protests compelled the paper 'to say plainly that even returned soldiers, whom everyone honours and wishes to repay to the utmost capacity of the country, can exhaust public patience'.¹⁰⁵ The comment of the *Press* must, however, be weighed against the reported comments of A.D. McLeod, Reform Member for Wairarapa and soon to be Minister of Lands. McLeod

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p.34

¹⁰² Memo from Thompson to Guthrie, 14 July 1923, L&S file 13/25-12, NA.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p.3.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p.4.

¹⁰⁵ *Press*, 11 August 1923, p.12.

observed that although he supported soldier representation on the proposed Dominion Revaluation Board rather than representation on the local committees, he was not sure that the RSA was the best body to make the choice as most settlers were not members of the RSA, and that discussions with soldier settlers in his electorate revealed dissatisfaction with the RSA.¹⁰⁶

Ten days after McLeod's comments, a deputation from the RSA Executive met Massey and was assured by him 'that the Government was anxious to put anything right which was now wrong and he hoped the Bill would be as nearly perfect as possible'.¹⁰⁷ The RSA thanked the House for passing what it called 'two masterpieces of legislation' and handed the following resolution to Massey:

It (Dominion Executive) thanks the Prime Minister and the Minister of Lands particularly, for the very careful and sympathetic consideration they, with their colleagues, have given to the condition of soldier settlers, as shown by the comprehensiveness of the measure.¹⁰⁸

The statement of the RSA was in accord with the feelings of some soldier settlers, and at a mass meeting of soldier settler representatives from Rangitikei, Hawkes Bay and Manawatu held in Palmerston North on 17 August 1923, the following resolution was passed:

That this meeting of soldier settlers place on record its high appreciation to the legislature and general public of New Zealand of the desire to ameliorate the position of all soldier settlers on farming lands as evidenced by the act passed during the present session.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ McLeod claimed to represent the largest numbers of soldier settlers in the House. This disguises the fact that soldiers need not necessarily belong long-term to the RSA to receive the benefit of its pressure-group activities and negotiations with the Government, *Press*, 10 August 1923, p.9.

¹⁰⁷ Report of Deputation, 20 August 1923, Land Corp file 13/25-13, NA.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Letter from the Palmerston North Branch, RSA, to the Prime Minister, 18 August 1923, L&S file 13/25-12, NA.

The *Round Table* reported that the passing of the Act received 'unqualified approval throughout the entire Dominion, for it makes exceedingly generous provision for the relief of the men'.¹¹⁰ The *Lyttelton Daily Times* claimed that the problems being faced by the soldiers had been avoidable with the exercise of ordinary care. The paper claimed that the findings of the Enquiry Boards completely vindicated previous Liberal criticisms and that:

The Masseyites had ignored every businesslike principle in its purchases of land for discharged soldiers and defied every competent critic of its reckless policy.... The Government was simply deaf to council, contemptuous of criticism, reckless of consequences.¹¹¹

The 1923 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act was the legislative mechanism by which the combined recommendations of the Enquiry Boards and the Department of Lands were put into action. A Dominion Revaluation Board was to be established which would receive reports from District Revaluation Committees and the local Commissioner of Crown Lands. The committee stage of the Bill brought forth some debate on the constitution of the Boards and also raised the issue of soldiers' representation. Massey was in favour of the District Committees being composed, where possible, of the members of the Enquiry Boards. He wanted no partisan 'wire pulling' in the appointments and maintained that the best and unbiased men were required.¹¹² The Leader of the Labour Party, Harry Holland, thought that local people should have a say in the appointment, while his fellow member, M.J. Savage, claimed that there was already the example of the Arbitration Court to follow in allowing partisan representation. Massey suggested that if the soldiers were given representation then so too must the Department of Lands, but he admitted that there would always be a bias towards the soldiers.¹¹³ An attempt by E.A. Ransom of Pahiataua to include

¹¹⁰ *Round Table*, December 1923, p.187.

¹¹¹ *Lyttelton Daily Times*, 2 August 1923, clipping on L&S file 26/1-10, NA.

¹¹² *Press*, 10 August 1923, p.9.

¹¹³ *ibid.*

provision of an appeal authority in the Act was defeated in committee.¹¹⁴ A.D. McLeod, who took over the Lands portfolio from Guthrie in June 1924, favoured the establishment of revaluation boards because, as he told a meeting of soldier settlers in Masterton, 'if the soldiers did the revaluing the tax payer would suffer, and if the civil servants did it, then the soldier might have a hard time. The setting up of the Boards was the best scheme that could be devised'.¹¹⁵ Sixteen members of the Enquiry Boards were subsequently appointed to the District Revaluation Committees. Otago was the only district not to have some continuity of personnel.¹¹⁶

The actual process of revaluation was straightforward enough in the case of Crown tenants who were to have the capital value of their properties for rent purposes reconsidered, and in almost all cases it was reduced. The predicament facing the Government was dealing with section 2 mortgage advances for the purchase of private lands. Where the Crown was the only mortgagee involved the process was relatively simple, but the majority of farms held under section 2 were encumbered with second and often third or subsequent mortgages. Thompson reported that: 'It is difficult and unreasonable to recommend the adoption of the suggestion to take power to reduce private mortgages, as such action would interfere too much with private as well as existing statutory rights'.¹¹⁷ He proposed adjustment of these mortgages by arrangement. The *Waikato Times* cautioned against the Government treating second mortgagees in any arbitrary fashion simply because of the widely held belief that the second mortgage represented vendors' profit on land sales. The paper was concerned that the lessening of mortgages as safe investments would reduce the available credit and increase interest charges.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ *Journals of the House of Representatives*, 9 August 1923, p.104.

¹¹⁵ *Wairarapa Age*, 12 September 1923, clipping on L&S file 13/25-13, NA.

¹¹⁶ Soldier Settlement: Remarks and Recommendation of the Undersecretary, *AJHR* C.9a, 1923; Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, C.9, 1924.

¹¹⁷ Soldier Settlement: Remarks and Recommendations by the Undersecretary for Lands, *AJHR*, C.9a, 1923, Part B, p.34.

¹¹⁸ *Waikato Times*, 14 August 1923, clipping on L&S file 26/1-10, NA.

The concern for the rights of the second mortgagee was progressively reduced through the 1920s and eventually came under sustained attack in the mortgage relief legislation of the 1930s. In 1926 the policy in operation was to protect the soldier settler from forced sale by insisting that the second mortgagee buy out the interests of the first mortgagee.¹¹⁹ This was a return to the pre-Enquiry Board policy which Brodrick had outlined. However, as Prime Minister Coates warned:

our difficulty is with the mortgagee. He complains bitterly of the attitude we have adopted. It may not be strictly fair but we have to think of these soldiers.... We have to be very careful not to damage the soldiers' credit as a class. If you start interfering it very often has an undesired effect.¹²⁰

The debate of the 1923 Amendment Bill represented a turning-point in the story of the soldier settlement scheme. The Reform leadership admitted openly and freely for the first time that mistakes had been made and that action was required.¹²¹ Massey suggested to the House that the Bill was for the benefit of those soldier settlers who made up the group of 32 per cent who were temporarily unsuccessful. He was surprised, not at the number of failures, but rather at the number of successes in the face of the severe economic difficulties faced by the soldier settlers.¹²² Massey also took the opportunity to criticise the policy of section 2 advances and admitted that mistakes had been made, although he confused the Land Boards, and the District Land Purchase Boards which had been established early in 1920. The existing administrative mechanisms of the Land Boards, and the specially-created District Land Purchase Boards, were to prove useful for politicians to deflect public criticism by blaming the supposedly independent Boards.

¹¹⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, 31 March 1926.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ It is significant that Guthrie was suffering ill-health and was at this time absent from the House, and had in fact little to do with the processing of the Enquiry Board reports. This had been handled by the Minister of Agriculture and Acting Minister of Lands, W. Nosworthy. As noted above, the new Undersecretary, Thompson, had less of a vested interest in protecting the actions of the Department during the settlement phase than his predecessor Brodrick.

¹²² *NZPD*, 8 August 1923, p.628.

The revaluation process was estimated to cost approximately £2 million. The *Lyttelton Daily Times* saw this admission as vindication of its (read Liberal's) earlier claims that the land purchase policies of the Government during the war had simply been to enrich its friends. The paper maintained that:

when he [Massey] was purchasing farm lands at war-boom prices he was warned by intelligently-edited newspapers of all shades of political opinion, by bankers, and by responsible government officials, that he was embarking upon a policy which must involve serious loss to the greater part of the population of this country.¹²³

The paper later claimed that had the Government 'exercised ordinary prudence the soldier settlers would not have been in their present sad plight - nor would the taxpayers'.¹²⁴

The 1921 depression, and the subsequent response of the Government, was a watershed in the story of soldier settlement in New Zealand. It was not just a case of finding the appropriate responses to an economic downturn; the unstated and perhaps unrecognised issue of the morality of the settlement scheme was also at stake. The admission of mistakes on the part of Massey, and the fine detail of the Enquiry Board reports had the effect of elevating the longer-term calls of the soldier settlers into a position of ideological dominance. Their subsequent victim status was assured, and the call that their problems were 'through no fault of their own' became the clarion cry for all subsequent views of the scheme. The positions of the Department and the Land Boards also underwent change in terms of the financial administration of the scheme and, although there would be exceptions, the general precedent of special consideration previously shown in access to the land was also established in financial administration. The inconsistency in the findings of the Enquiry Boards and the subsequent decision of the Minister of Lands to establish a Dominion Revaluation Board also started off the gradual reduction in

¹²³ *Lyttelton Daily Times*, 3 August 1923, clipping on L&S file 26/1-10, NA. A concern for soldiers, and a continuation of the wartime imperative to spare nothing on their repatriation, is notably absent in this comment.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, 13 August 1923.

the autonomy of the Land Boards - a process that gained speed with the increasing pressure for efficiency and central control which emerged during the 'twenties and 'thirties. Once established, the concept of government intervention in mortgage contracts was to have wider application in a later government's relief measures when depression again hit the farming community in the 1930s.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ In 1928 Professor Hunter of Victoria University told the National Industrial Conference that the action of the Government in writing off losses for soldiers had to be paralleled by private mortgagees in private transactions, *Evening Post*, 28 March 1928, p.11.

CHAPTER 13

MIDDLE YEARS

With the instigation of the revaluation process in 1924, the attitude of the Department of Lands towards the on-going provision of special assistance to the soldiers altered. Although the underpinning of paternalism still remained strong, the operations of the Dominion Revaluation Board and the concomitant regional Land Boards were seen as correcting any problems of over-valued land and attendant financial problems facing soldiers, which had emerged because of the 1921 depression. The Department considered the depression as the primary cause of the soldiers' difficulties, although inexperience and lack of application were also recognised as significant in some cases. In 1924 the Dominion Revaluation Board was further empowered to investigate current account mortgages which had covered advances for development purposes. The completion of the revaluation process, and the generally improved position of commodity markets during the mid-twenties, gave sufficient reason to believe that the financial problems of soldier settlement had been dealt with. The cost to the country of revaluing soldier farms was generally perceived to be between £2 and £3 million. An RSA deputation meeting Prime Minister Massey and the Minister of Lands in Dunedin in September 1924 requested that advances for housing under section 2 be opened up again for soldiers. Massey rebuffed them, claiming that a lot of other people as well as soldiers were wanting money and he observed: 'This little trouble with revaluations and so forth; if we get out of that, stock and everything else, with three millions, we will do well'.¹

Massey's 'little trouble' involved the investigation of applications from 5,347 soldier settlers who applied for revaluation inspections before the statutory deadline

¹ Notes of meeting, State Advances file 9/86, NA.

of 28 February 1924.² A total of 23 district committees of the Wellington based Dominion Revaluation Board began work in October 1923. The Dominion Revaluation Board was chaired by J.B. Thompson, Undersecretary for Lands, and comprised four members, including the Valuer-General.³ The first reports from the committees were available to the Dominion Revaluation Board in January 1924. The district committees had been requested to deal with each settlement in a particular area of the land district at the same time, so that the Dominion Revaluation Board could make decisions which had local continuity. To assist this work, the Commissioners were required to supply maps of all soldier holdings.⁴

The Dominion Revaluation Board had the power to reduce the capital value of leasehold properties and to reduce mortgages under section 2 of the 1917 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act. The Dominion Revaluation Board could also postpone or remit rent and interest arrears owing as at 30 June 1923, and recommend to the regional Land Boards an exemption on rent payments where the settlers' problems arose not from over-valuation, but from having properties that were not viable, even under favourable conditions. In practice, the Dominion Revaluation Board preferred to grant postponements of rent, or mortgage repayment arrears, rather than give outright remissions. This was to ensure that those settlers who had managed to meet their commitments were not penalised for the benefit of their less capable neighbours. The Dominion Revaluation Board also

² Those soldiers who failed to apply in time had to wait either for a sympathetic hearing from their local Land Board or for legislative help under section 216 of the 1924 Land Act. Reasons for application had to be specific and low prices for farm products were not considered an adequate reason for requesting a revaluation. Thompson suggested to the Commissioner of Crown Lands for Hawkes Bay that those soldiers who had failed to lodge applications for revaluation within the time limit 'had only themselves to blame for their invidious positions'. However, in recognition of their difficulties the Land Board was instructed to forfeit the properties and put the soldiers back in possession at a value commensurate with their neighbours' revaluation.

³ Prior to commencing their revaluations, members of the Dominion Board had inspected soldier settlements in various parts of the country to get a feel for the conditions under which the soldier settlers were farming.

⁴ Memo from Thompson to all Commissioners, 1 March 1923, L&S file 26/274/64, NA. These maps have not been traced but would prove invaluable for any quantitative study that might be attempted.

achieved some success in the mould of the earlier operations of the Valuer-General by persuading private mortgagees to reduce their interest in soldiers' farms.⁵

The first report of the Dominion Revaluation Board noted that its work was not the totality of assistance to the soldier settlers and Thompson observed:

it must be realized that much of the relief afforded by the Board would be rendered nugatory unless followed up with sympathetic assistance from respective Land Boards by way of Current Account advances where warranted, and further postponements where necessary in the future. It is apparent that a firm hand must be kept on some men, but the endeavour of the Dominion Board has been to give all soldier settlers a fair chance for the future.⁶

The Minister of Lands had specifically instructed Thompson to treat as leniently as possible all settlers who were making an honest endeavour to succeed in the year following the revaluation of individual farms.⁷ Thompson's comments also reflect his intention of asserting the control of Head Office over the district Land Boards, something Brodrick had been unable to do, and to ensure that regional variations in approach to the soldiers, which had become apparent in the settlement phase, did not re-emerge in the relief measures. He was also determined to minimise the

⁵ These private interests included the stock agencies, and Patriotic Societies which had advanced funds to some soldier settlers in the early days of the scheme. W.A. Cook of the Gorge settlement, situated on Crown Land on the Saddle Road above Woodville, had found that by 1926 his farming operations were being hampered by his indebtedness. The Department agreed to remit his rental arrears if the second mortgagee, the Hawkes Bay War Relief Association, agreed to the discharge of its mortgage of £500. The Association decided, however, 'that the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Wellington, be informed that W.A. Cook having been placed on land as a returned soldier as part of a government scheme which this society had no part in formulating, but only assisted the soldier, any loss incurred by reason of the weakness of the scheme should be borne by the Government alone. This society is therefore not prepared to recommend a reduction of the mortgage', letter from the Hawkes Bay War Relief Association, 16 November 1926, L&S file 26/614, NA.

⁶ Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1924, p.15.

⁷ Minute from McLeod to Thompson, 30 January 1925, L&S file 21/219, NA. Not all Commissioners complied with this directive and the case of Herbert John Ferguson, who farmed in the West Coast Land District, is informative. A power of sale was exercised by the Commissioner on 19 April 1924 because it was thought that Ferguson would never make a go of it. Thompson intervened because a less pessimistic report from the local Ranger was on the file. Thompson discovered that the Commissioner was proceeding with the action despite Ferguson having applied for a revaluation, although inspection had been delayed. L&S file 26/5150, NA.

influence of parochialism in the operations of the revaluation process. This is apparent in his directive to all Commissioners outlining the revaluation policy:

It is the desire of the Government to place soldier settlers in solvent positions, and it should be the aim of the district offices to place each settlers' affairs before the Dominion Board in such form and at such valuation as will enable the Board to carry out the desire of the Government.⁸

Thompson later described the policy of the Dominion Revaluation Board as attempting to ensure that 'the settler may be placed in what may be termed a fairly satisfactory position'.⁹ A more pragmatic concern expressed by Thompson was the possible effect the realising of the Government's investment in unprofitable farms would have on the Department. He was averse to the Department managing and maintaining farms that fell back to it at a time when these properties were not attractive on the open market.¹⁰ Thompson was also concerned that further revaluations of small properties 'might create substantial goodwill on sales being made to adjoining owners'. This indicates that there remained a strong element of restrictive paternalism underpinning the scheme, which suggests that the relief given by the revaluation process to ameliorate the settlers' pressing financial difficulties was not to be seen as an exploitable bounty. A strong continuity with the original intention of the scheme, where a ten-year restriction on transfer had been imposed to stop possible speculation in soldiers' land, is evident.

Regional variation in the degree of satisfaction with the rulings of the Dominion Revaluation Board among the individual soldier settlers was also apparent. For example, the soldier settlers on the Mangapurua settlement remained highly dissatisfied, claiming that half their number would have to leave while the balance

⁸ L&S file 26/274/64, NA.

⁹ Memo from Thompson to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Napier, 23 February 1926, L&S file 26/274/64, NA.

¹⁰ Confidential Memo from Thompson to the Minister of Lands on the submission of the Annual Report of Department of Lands and Survey, 12 June 1928, L&S file 36/24, NA.

might achieve only a precarious existence.¹¹ On the other hand, the settlers on the Wharekaka block in the Gisborne Land District felt they had been treated very liberally by the local committee of the Dominion Revaluation Board and observed that:

the Government are to be congratulated on securing the services of such highly capably [sic] men who met the situation fearlessly even against the opinions and sentiments of prominent local farmers in whom the speculative instinct is strongly developed.¹²

Notwithstanding this expression of support, an enterprise such as the Dominion Revaluation Board which operated on national lines, did not always find favour in the regions. On a visit to the Hawkes Bay and Gisborne regions, the Minister of Lands, A.D. McLeod, was informed that there were cases where the Dominion Revaluation Board had ignored the recommendations of its district committees. McLeod informed Thompson that 'in the case of the Awatotera settlers, Putorino, one of the settlers stated that a member of the committee had said they should get the land for nothing'.¹³ The opposite view was expressed in a letter to Prime Minister Massey from the manager of a Canterbury stock company. Concerned at its own possible losses, H. Matson & Co. claimed that the revaluation of soldier properties was down to too low a level and that some protection should be given to the taxpayers of the country 'as surely there is no reason why huge profits should be permitted to be made out of these places at the expense of the country'.¹⁴ In an editorial entitled 'Woes of the Soldier Settler', the *Lyttelton Daily Times* claimed that the Government was fooling the soldiers by suggesting that relief was being given by reducing the value of the land. The paper claimed that 'to reduce the price of his land, but leave him saddled with a mortgage that would sink him is

¹¹ Telegram from F. Langstone, Labour Member for Waimarino, to the Minister of Lands, 8 November 1924, L&S file 21/296, NA.

¹² Letter from the Wharekaka settlers to K.S. Williams, Reform Member for Bay of Plenty, 9 July 1924, Valuation Department file 12/573, NA.

¹³ Memo from McLeod to Thompson, 4 April 1925, L&S file 26/274/64, NA.

¹⁴ Letter from H. Matson & Co, Stock, Station, and Land Agents, Christchurch, to Massey, 1924, L&S file 26/274/64, NA.

not assisting him at all'.¹⁵ The *New Zealand Herald* observed: 'A good deal of disappointment exists among soldier settlers over the result of the revaluation scheme.... there exists in soldier circles a very decided under-current of dissatisfaction'.¹⁶ The *Truth*, in contrast, could see only that the Crown had lowered the values of properties at the expense of the taxpayer, and claimed that 'the soldier settlers are jubilant for the win they have scored'.¹⁷

Some discontent over the special consideration shown to soldier settlers was also expressed in the farming community. In a letter to the Minister of Lands, one writer claimed that soldier settlers on the Puahui and Ngahapi settlements received relief from the Dominion Revaluation Board when they were not in need of it, and that they had delayed taking over motor cars that they had ordered until after the revaluation committee's visit.¹⁸ The Ardkeen settlement and the problems of the settlers received a degree of publicity in the Hawkes Bay media, and drew the following response from a 'local':

The only trouble with Ardkeen is the small areas. Otherwise the settlement is as good as any other one. The only way to solve the problem is to cull out the slugs who will never do any good even if they had the land given to them.... You can take it from me Sir, that I know what I'm talking about as I have watched Ardkeen with the greatest of interest right from the start. I am an old settler "who has made good" and who has not been spoon fed. Did you know the settlement can run well appointed residences, wireless sets and motorcars ? Little wonder they can't pay rent.¹⁹

Much the same feeling is evident in the comments on the Beattie settlement made by a civilian who had lost his property because of the slump:

On my farm I put in a solid sixteen hours a day, ploughing, fencing, doing everything I could myself to save expense and get on. What a

¹⁵ *The Lyttelton Daily Times*, 27 February 1924, clipping on L&S file 26/1-10, NA.

¹⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 12 August 1924, L&S file 26/274/64, NA.

¹⁷ *Truth*, 8 November 1924, cutting on L&S file 26/274/64, NA.

¹⁸ L&S file 26/5271, NA.

¹⁹ Letter to the Undersecretary for Lands, 7 September 1927, L&S file 21/172, NA.

different case with these soldier settlers - if fencing is to be done, they get a grant from the Government and employ fencers, the same for scrub cutting and ploughing although most of them have horses and ploughs, yet they get a man with a team, doing nothing themselves but pottering around the house. And this is the type of farmer the Government is backing while the genuine farmer, who is the backbone of the country receives nothing but pays out in some form of tax or other to keep these lazy fellows, who are not worth a fly to the country.... Three of these soldiers own motorcars and of the remaining two - one has an interest in a part bush farm in the Auckland district and the other has interests in bush lands in ---, instead of paying their rents, which they can do as well as others, they send money to work these places.... If they can get out of paying by pulling a poor mouth, so they will for all time.²⁰

No doubt this criticism was motivated at least to some extent by jealousy, but the implications are important for constructing an alternative view of the soldier settlement scheme to that hitherto espoused by the historians. Public opposition to the notion of the special status of soldiers and the scheme is something that is missing from the received orthodoxy. This may, in part, reflect the ideological victory of what can be described as a soldier-centric view of the scheme and the soldiers' positions as victims within it.

The clearest recent articulation of this is found in *In The Shadow of War: New Zealand Soldiers Talk About World War One and Their Lives*, an oral history edited by Nicholas Boyack and Jane Tolerton. This was based upon a larger oral history project in which Erle Crawford, one of the soldier settler respondents whose story was not published, observed:

In '20,'21,'22, New Zealand suffered a devil of a recession. Well, we[he and his brother] went, into the farm with mortgages up to here! Didn't take much of a recession to make us sink, did it? So for years we didn't know whether we had a farm or didn't have a farm. Rehab, which was then administered by the Lands and Survey Department, stuck to us, and rearranged our mortgages and put us on our feet and started us off again.²¹

²⁰ Letter from J. Beale to the Minister of Lands, 1 July 1924, L&S file 21/154, NA.

²¹ Oral testimony quoted in N. Boyack and J. Tolerton, 'World War I Oral History Archive, report to the Social Sciences Research Fund, p.18, transcripts and tapes, WTU.

The editors noted of this claim by Mr Crawford: 'This was unusual - and probably explained by the equally unusual amount of capital the brothers were able to sink into their property. In most cases "the rehab" would not alter mortgage arrangements...' The editors discounted a statement that ran counter to the pervading orthodoxy despite it being made by a surviving discharged soldier settler. It was noted that Crawford had the benefit of some starting capital from his father's estate, something the editors considered unusual, without giving any evidence for this opinion.

The revaluation process progressed quickly, and by June 1924 some 40 per cent of the properties had been inspected.²² The Minister of Lands told a public meeting in Thames that he hoped that the exercise would be completed by March 1925 and that the soldier settler was now much better off than his civilian neighbour. However, he cautioned that there was a tendency on the part of some soldier farmers in persisting to make the issue a political rather than a farming one, and that if this attitude were to continue the soldiers might lose support from the community.²³

The Dominion Revaluation Board made reductions to Crown rents and mortgages to the sum of £2,480,808. This was from a total of £17,998,668, representing the capital values of Crown Leases and funds invested in section 2 mortgages.²⁴ Up to 31 March 1927 the Dominion Revaluation Board had also negotiated for a reduction of private mortgages held by soldiers from £159,958 down to £39,256. Private mortgages and debts to the value of £56,531 were also purchased by the Government on behalf of soldier mortgagors at an overall discount of 37 per cent.²⁵ Completion of most of the revaluations and adjustments in current account mortgages, which had been carried out through 1925 and on into 1926, put the scheme on to a sounder footing. According to Thompson, any Crown Land soldier settler with an aggregate income of less than £300 per year would require special

²² L&S file 26/1-10, NA.

²³ *New Zealand Times*, 27 January 1925, clipping on L&S file 26/1-10, NA.

²⁴ Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1926, p.3.

²⁵ Report of the Chairman, Dominion Revaluation Board, *AJHR*, C.9, 1927, p.3.

consideration from the Land Boards, while those section 2 men 'in hopeless positions to meet annual charges' could have their farms foreclosed and re-let to them as Crown Land on a Special Tenures Lease under the 1915 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act.²⁶

As previously noted, a concern of all who were involved in the discussion of the financial position of the soldier settlers from the 1921 depression onwards had been how to deal equitably with soldiers in general, yet at the same time safeguard the interests of those soldiers who had managed, often with great personal difficulty, to meet their commitments to the Department. In 1928 the settlers on the Te Whiti settlement in the Wairarapa complained that their position would have been helped had the men who were triers got more and others a little less. They claimed: 'We are penalised for putting in extra work and extra cash of our own'. The Minister of Lands replied: 'Under the economic conditions in which we found ourselves the "leadswinger" got the advantage. The Department tried to avoid it, but it always came to the point of either giving the man the reduction or selling him up'.²⁷ It appears that, despite Massey's attempts to ensure a non-biased programme of assistance for soldiers, it did indeed develop a bias towards soldiers of lesser farming ability.²⁸

The findings of the Dominion Revaluation Board had also revealed that many of the soldier settlers were operating on properties that could produce only limited income. Thompson expressed concern that the Controller of Accounts had found cases in the Marlborough and Nelson districts where, after allowing for living expenses and maintenance costs as priority charges on the income of the properties, there was only sufficient revenue remaining to meet the annual charges owing to the Department. He explained:

²⁶ Memo from Thompson to all Commissioners, 13 November 1925, L&S file 26/274/64, NA.

²⁷ Notes of interview between settlers of Te Whiti settlement and A.D. McLeod, Minister of Lands and local Member, 6 August 1928, L&S file 26/5/23, NA.

²⁸ *Press*, 10 August 1923, p.9.

this has given me much concern and I am convinced that provided these settlers occupy their separate holdings and are able to keep themselves and their families in modest circumstances, it is preferable to retain them on these poor lands rather than swell the ranks of the unemployed.²⁹

The recognition that in some cases sections were too small to provide an adequate income also encouraged the Department to institute a policy of amalgamation of sections on some settlements so as to improve the chances of success for farmers who remained.³⁰ For example, two of the original settlers on the Almadale settlement near Feilding were transferred to other settlements and their sections divided between the three remaining men.³¹ The financial position of the settlers on the section 2 settlement at Taikorea was also hindered by the small size of their sections, while the local revaluation committee had also reported that the soil and grass were of poor quality. The Department proposed to amalgamate six sections between three remaining settlers because the three departing men were willing to transfer their interests, as long as they were not to be pursued by the Department for the outstanding arrears. The Commissioner proposed forfeiting the sections and then reallotting them to the remaining three settlers. This was so as to avoid the cumbersome requirements of the Audit Department for a full investigation into the financial position of the men before allowing transfer within ten years of taking up the section, and so 'more speedily settle matters'.³² This attitude is significant because the ten-year restriction on the right of transfer embodied in the original act was also seen by some soldier settlers as a restriction on their personal freedom to

²⁹ Confidential Memo from Thompson to McLeod on submission of the Department of Lands Annual Report, 12 June 1928, L&S file 36/24, NA.

³⁰ W.G. Allan, in his 1967 thesis on soldier settlement in the Canterbury Land district, claims that the establishment in Canterbury of a programme of voluntary amalgamation in 1937 led the country. The programme involved co-operation between the Departments of Lands, Valuation, and the State Advances Corporation, with input from the RSA. The degree of sophistication may have been new, but the concept of voluntary amalgamation had emerged in the mid-1920s.

³¹ L. Keeyes took a section on the Putorino settlement near Rata, while G.D. Smith went to the Ahiaruhe settlement, memo from the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Wellington, to the Undersecretary, 14 October 1927, L&S file 26/5/35, NA.

³² Memo from Thompson to McLeod, 30 July 1925, L&S file 21/203, NA. This can be construed as either local concern for the soldier settlers on this block outweighing directives from the Audit Department, or an indulgence in expedient administrative behaviour.

maximise their own economic position. A settler on the Mangateparu settlement wrote to the Prime Minister, Gordon Coates, complaining that the ten-year restriction,

was a gross injustice; for in many instances the settler found out after a year or so at the game, that he was not suitable for the life, nor, the life suitable for him. Which meant that he was forced to walk off, being unable to claim compensation for his own work, or return for such private money as he may have spent on improvements.³³

The operations of the Dominion Revaluation Board had also highlighted the perennial problem of local body rates on soldier farms. Reductions in capital values by the Revaluation Board did not affect the rating values, which were established under the Valuation of Land Act, 1908. Any ratepayer unhappy with the valuation entered on the county roll had the right to a special valuation under section 36 of the 1908 Act.³⁴ Soldier settlers on a block near Gisborne found that the unimproved value of their properties was higher than the re-assessed improved value established by the Dominion Revaluation Board. Soldiers also found that in some cases their rates were almost half the amount of their yearly rents.³⁵ The Department appeared unsympathetic, and at least one soldier Crown tenant was threatened with forfeiture for the non-payment of rates under section 102 of the Land Act 1924. In this case the Undersecretary informed the Minister that 'the forfeiture will not actually be put into effect without a special report having been first obtained, but your approval is asked for in the hope that the fact of forfeiture having been approved will induce Mr... to meet his rating liabilities'.³⁶

³³ Letter from Allen Maxwell to Gordon Coates, 12 November 1925, L&S file 21/102, NA.

³⁴ L&S file 26/274/64, NA.

³⁵ Letter from the Wharekaka soldier settlers to their local Member, K.S. Williams, 9 July 1924, Valuation Department file 12/573, NA: Belshaw, 'The Economic Position of the Farmer', noted that in the period 1913-14 to 1925-26 local body rates more than doubled while export prices increased by 38 percent.

³⁶ Minute from the Undersecretary to the Minister of Lands, L&S file 26/540, NA.

As a reflection of the misinformation in circulation regarding the operations of the soldier settlement scheme, the Dominion Revaluation Board produced an emphatic defence of the Government's wartime land purchase policy in its 1925 report. The Board claimed that land purchase procedures were conducted carefully and conservatively, with advice being taken from qualified valuers. Observing that there was massive public pressure to settle the soldiers, the Board concluded that the Government could not have delayed the scheme and had to enter into the market at the prices then ruling. As to the question of compulsory purchase of estate land, the Board claimed this would have resulted in long delays. The reductions were, according to the Board, the cost of repatriation.³⁷

Newspaper reaction to this report of the operations of the Dominion Revaluation Board mirrored the variation exhibited about the earlier Enquiry Boards, and differed between the larger dailies, and provincial papers. The *Gisborne Times* claimed that it was not just the cost of land that had hindered the progress of the soldier settlers and, despite the 'political capital' made from the fact that too much had been paid for land, 'in great measure the post-war slump was to blame for the plight in which so many soldiers found themselves'.³⁸ The *New Zealand Times* claimed that the report of the Board 'is of sufficient unbiased good sense to settle the question [of soldier settlement] for ever'.³⁹ The paper went on to portray the scheme as a point of honour between the Government and the soldiers, which 'the Government fulfilled with a generosity unimpaired by booming land values'.⁴⁰ The *Auckland Star* described the Dominion Board's defence as interesting, but not the last word on the subject. It cited the Auditor-General, who had reported in 1925 that:

Audit investigation has disclosed the fact that a considerable proportion of the losses [on soldier settlement] might have been avoided if greater care and precaution had been observed in the local

³⁷ Report of the Chairman, Dominion Revaluation Board, *AJHR*, C.9, 1925, p.3.

³⁸ *Gisborne Times*, 14 August 1926, clipping on L&S file 26/274/64, NA.

³⁹ *New Zealand Times*, 24 September 1925, clipping on L&S file 26/1-10, NA.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

administration and if opportunity had been taken of the expert machinery of the Valuation Department when assessing values for the purchase of properties, or as a basis on which to make advances.⁴¹

Despite the Auditor-General's benefit of hindsight, the *Lyttelton Daily Times* claimed this report supported the often heard criticism that, had the Government taken more advice from locals, 'the taxpayer would have had less to grumble about today'. The Audit report, on top of that of the Dominion Revaluation Board, convinced the paper that 'the scandal of the Government's land purchases grows, and no one can say what its ultimate size will be'.⁴² The report of the 'entirely independent' Dominion Revaluation Board was interpreted by the *Wanganui Chronicle* as complete vindication of the Government's soldier settlement scheme in the face of politically-inspired criticism.⁴³ The paper seems to have been unaware of Thompson's position on the Board.⁴⁴ The *Taranaki Herald* was concerned that a large number of soldier settlers would abandon their properties before relief arrived from the Dominion Revaluation Board. The paper took a very

⁴¹ *Auckland Star*, 24 September 1925, clipping on L&S file 26/1-10, NA: Quoted in a Memo from Thompson to the Secretary to the Treasury, 12 August 1925, L&S file 26/1-10, NA. The publicity surrounding the publication of this report necessitated a lengthy rebuttal from the Undersecretary. Thompson pointed out that in November 1919 the Valuer-General had withdrawn his staff from valuing soldier farms because of demands for up-to-date district revaluations. The Auditor-General had earlier criticised the operations of the Land Boards for not taking the personal character of the applicants sufficiently into consideration when lending money to the soldier settlers.

⁴² *Lyttelton Daily Times*, no date, clipping on L&S file 26/1-10, NA. This appears to be late July 1925.

⁴³ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 25 September 1925, clipping on L&S file 26/1-10, NA.

⁴⁴ The issue of impartiality by the local revaluation committees was not one that gained any degree of publicity. However, the case of the Kopane soldier settlement near Palmerston North, is revealing. The capital values of the farms on the Kopane settlement were sustained by the local revaluation committee whose Chairman, L.T. McLean, claimed that the block contained some of the best-quality land in the North Island. The appeal of several settlers was fobbed off by McLean on the grounds that the majority of the settlers were successful, and that the fault lay with the individuals who were appealing, not the land. Letter from McLean to Thompson, 20 June 1925, L&S file 21/179, NA. However, during the war McLean had been the subject of an enquiry into allegations of land aggregation and in 1920, at the height of the land boom, he had sold a large section of the Kopane swamp in very close proximity to the soldier settlement for well publicised record prices. These prices had been used by the Minister of Lands, David Guthrie, as vindication of the price paid by the Crown for the 'Heighden' estate land purchased for the soldier settlement. McLean also sold land to the Crown for soldier settlement in the Apiti area after World War II.

pessimistic view of the position of soldier settlers in Taranaki where it was claimed:

Hundreds of them have already abandoned their holdings and many others are just trying to carry on against hope, because they have no other occupation to turn to, or on the chance of relief coming from the Government.⁴⁵

Treasury was unusually supportive of the position in which the Department of Lands had found itself, and provided a more tempered opinion than that expressed by the Auditor-General. In a briefing to the Minister of Finance in 1927 over the losses sustained by the special Lands for Settlement Account (Discharged Soldier Settlement) established in 1919 with the creation of District Land Purchase Boards, Treasury observed:

The Government was faced with the necessity for providing large bodies of soldiers with land on their return from active service. The need of suitable areas of land was pressing as the obligations of the country towards the returned soldiers could not be shelved even temporarily. As a consequence purchases were made hurriedly and, as experience has proved, fictitious prices were paid and this despite the fact that men of experience in each land district were appointed to the local land purchase boards.⁴⁶

From the soldiers' perspective, the findings of both the Enquiry Boards and revaluation committees reinforced their moral position with the Government because it had been 'proved' that the scheme had serious faults, not all of which could be attributed to the 1921 depression. This enabled the soldiers to call for every possible concession from the Land Boards and the Department. Hence the soldier settler 'problem' remained a political rather than a farming or economic one. This was particularly evident on the larger soldier settlements. Because of the political nature of the situation, foreclosure or forfeiture, as opposed to threats

⁴⁵ *Taranaki Herald*, 13 May 1924, clipping on L&S file 26/274/64, NA.

⁴⁶ Treasury Report to the Minister of Finance, L&S file 36/24, NA.

of them, seem to have been a very last resort.⁴⁷ However, the position of soldiers as especially deserving of consideration in terms of access to land, be it rural or urban, continued to animate claims by the RSA, with support from the Farmers' Union.⁴⁸

Despite criticism of the expense of the revaluation process,⁴⁹ the attitude adopted by the Department of Lands was that, allowing for good seasons, the 'soldier settler problem' had been met. Thompson had seen many of the earlier problems as stemming from the inabilities of individual soldier settlers, and he informed the Secretary to the Treasury that 'a large portion of the losses are attributable to the lack of regard for State property held unfortunately by a number of men who made the administration of the Department more difficult than it might have otherwise have been'.⁵⁰ With the structural problems, which had plagued the scheme during the first few years, adjusted by intervention, and the passage of time and experience, it was to be the 'personal equation' or abilities which would account for the subsequent success or failure of individual soldier settlers. The Commissioner of Lands for Hawkes Bay observed:

The completion of the operations of the Dominion Revaluation Board brings to a close a work of outstanding benefit to the soldier settler - placing him in such a position that, while he is the envy of his adjoining civilian settler, he must feel that given ordinary reasonable prices and seasons his future success is entirely a matter of economy and steady industry on his part.⁵¹

⁴⁷ The Undersecretary observed in 1925 that 'a judicious exercise of the forfeiture penalty is, of course, necessary to ensure reasonable compliance with terms and conditions; but it is never resorted to until every other means of obtaining satisfaction has failed', Annual Report of the Department of Lands and Survey, *AJHR*, C.1, 1925, p.4.

⁴⁸ Letter from the Secretary of the New Zealand Farmers' Union to the Minister of Lands, 13 June 1929, L&S file 26/274/57, NA.

⁴⁹ The Treasury was upset that revaluations reduced the amount of interest available to the Consolidated Fund on the original loans made to the Department of Lands to fund the scheme from the increase in taxation originally intended to meet war debt, memo from the Secretary to the Treasury to the Minister of Finance, 17 April 1925, L&S file 26/1-10, NA.

⁵⁰ Memo from Thompson to the Secretary to the Treasury, 12 August 1925, L&S file 26/1-10, NA.

⁵¹ Memo from the Commissioner of Crown Land, Hawkes Bay to Chairman, Dominion Revaluation Board, 12 May 1927, L&S file 26/274/64, NA.

The Undersecretary noted in 1928: 'the time has arrived when by thrift and good management the bulk of the settlers should have established themselves sufficiently well to carry on and improve their future prospects without further reliance on the state'.⁵² Prime Minister Ward was also confident of the position of the soldier settlers and in 1929 he reported that 'it may be stated with confidence that the great majority of soldier settlers are now satisfactorily established, while the remainder are receiving every assistance possible to enable them to attain that position'.⁵³

This optimistic attitude was also reflected by the RSA, which had mellowed partially in the years after the war. In a placatory statement in 1930, an editorial in the *NZRSA Review* observed:

looking back over the fifteen years during which the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act has operated, in an endeavour to provide ex-soldiers with farms and the finance to run them, we must say that the effort has been successful. This statement is not the forerunner to supporting reasons, but merely a review of the position from the broadest standpoint. Mistakes on any side are always easy to find.⁵⁴

⁵² Memo from Thompson to McLeod, 12 June 1928, L&S file 36/24, NA.

⁵³ Prime Minister's Report to the Governor-General for the latter's secret dispatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 24 July 1929, L&S file 26/1/112, NA.

⁵⁴ *NZRSA Review*, May 1930, p.8.

CHAPTER 14

DEPRESSION AND SURVIVAL

The historian of the Mangateparu soldier settlement recorded the impact upon the settlers and their families of the leaner years of the 1930s depression after the recent arrival of the 'good times' in the late 1920s: 'Gradually, worsening depression and falling prices put farmers back to conditions as bad as those of 1922 and 1923. However, the soldiers and their families were accustomed to hard times'.¹

Despite the Government's confidence for the soldier settlers' future, and the stated aims of releasing the soldiers from its protective embrace, the arrival of economic depression in the late 1920s forced a continuation of the Department's earlier policy of special treatment for the soldier settlers. As part of the financial retrenchment instituted by the Minister of Finance, W. Downie Stewart, the decision was made in 1931 to strip the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Account of almost all of its accumulated operating revenue for transfer to the Consolidated Fund. This had the effect of severely curtailing the settlement of first-time applicants, and further reduced the amount available for seasonal advance on current account. Upon instructions from Downie Stewart, advances were to be kept to a minimum and restricted to essentials.² The financial constraints also meant the Department discouraged settlers from approaching it to take over outstanding private debt with stock companies. Hence at a time when commodity prices were low, the soldier settlers were also faced with an apparent reduction in the financial assistance that could be provided by the Department of Lands. Assistance had to take some other form. Building upon experience gained in the 1920s, the Department turned to a regime of limited financial assistance and

¹ Perry, *Soldiers of the Mangateparu*, pp.66-67.

² Accounts Circular 319, Department of Lands and Survey Head Office, to all Commissioners of Crown Lands, 30 October 1931, L&S file 26/1-14, NA.

budgetary control to carry the soldier settlers on Crown Land over the worst of the depression.

The optimism of the later 1920s, as expressed by the Undersecretary and the Commissioners, was replaced with a more pragmatic view of the future responsibilities of the Department of Lands. The Commissioner for Taranaki observed in his annual report that, 'The present indications are that all preconceived ideas of successful establishment must be revised, owing to the loss of equities and margins carefully built up by the soldier farmers in previous years'.³ The Wellington Commissioner noted that 'the occurrence of the slump at this time is most unfortunate, as settlers were just beginning to feel the benefit of the liberal concessions granted by the Dominion Revaluation Board in recent years'.⁴ The 1932 Annual Report recognised that the Department would need to continue a strong intervention policy with soldier settlement administration:⁵

it would seem, indeed, that the State's obligation to many of these men and their families has not been met by placing them on the land and carrying on up to the present point. Sympathetic guidance and control will be needed for years yet in a great many cases.⁶

A policy of temporary concessions for individual soldiers was instituted in the hope of keeping them on the land until prices improved, rather than continue with the nation-wide operations of the Dominion Revaluation Board. The policy of temporary concessions involved providing budgetary control for over 35 per cent of the 3,783 soldier settler Crown tenants holding current account mortgages.⁷ A large proportion of these settlers were kept in occupation despite the gross returns

³ Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1933, p.5.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Report of Discharged Soldiers Settlement, *AJHR*, C.9, 1932, p.2.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Lands and Survey Internal Financial Report, 19 March 1935: Note from F.Langstone, Labour spokesperson for Lands to E.A. Ransom, the Minister of Lands, 20 March 1935, L&S file 26/1-15 NA.

of their properties not meeting even their financial obligations to the Department.⁸ These obligations were postponed or remitted so that the farms would provide expenses and maintenance costs, plus a subsistence living, and so keep the soldiers from becoming a charge on the unemployment funds.⁹

Despite the intervention into the individual soldiers' lives that budgeting represented, it did find favour with the RSA. At stake was the distribution priority accorded to claimants on severely reduced farm income because, while commodity prices fluctuated, fixed charges remained relatively inelastic. Which of the Crown, the soldier settler, private creditors and mortgagees was to have priority? A remit from the Dominion Council of the RSA on 10 July 1933 asked for the budgetary system to be extended to all soldier settlers by having the total proceeds of the farms placed into the control of local Commissioners of Crown Lands. Under the RSA proposal, funds were to be distributed in priority order: first to the soldier settler for reasonable living expenses, second for farm maintenance costs, and third to mortgagees. The Minister declined to implement such a general policy, as it was claimed that the Department was not legally entitled to infringe upon the rights of other mortgagees. However, the Minister expected that the adjustment commissions established to handle the general problem of farm debt could achieve something similar to that proposed by the RSA.¹⁰

⁸ Certain priorities were to be met by the budgetary process. The maintenance of the capital of the current accounts and the value of farms was a first priority, followed by farm working, management, maintenance and living expenses. Payment of land charges and the establishment of reserves and reduction of capital charges was followed, lastly, by personal requisitions of the individual soldier settler. The settler was informed of the amount proposed to be allowed for working and living expenses, with a warning that payment of these would cease should the Department 'consider that he was farming in an unprofitable manner and not likely to give the best return on the State capital employed on his behalf'. Memo from the Undersecretary for Lands to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Canterbury, 18 May 1931, L&S file 26/1-13, NA.

⁹ Memo from the Undersecretary for Lands to the Minister of Lands, 4 February 1936, State Advances file 29/4/2, NA. From the figures quoted it appears that section 2 men were not included in the budgeting strategy.

¹⁰ Letter from the Minister of Lands to the General-Secretary of the RSA, 23 September 1933, L&S file 26/1-15, NA. The Rural Mortgagors' Final Adjustment Act 1934 included provision for the appointment by the Court of Review of "trustees" who were responsible for controlling all income and expenditure under a stay order mechanism. It is suggested that relatively few applications were made under the provision because the farmers perceived themselves as being placed into a state of serfdom. See Barrie Macdonald and David Thomson, 'Mortgage Relief, Farm Finance, and Rural

The policy of budget and control, and the provision of operating seasonal finance, demanded the continual input of capital, albeit limited, by the Government. The trade-off was a protection of the Crown's security. In many instances the whole financial return on the farm's production was taken, while the farmer was provided with a living allowance and farm maintenance funds.¹¹ Settlers in the Waimarino district were receiving living expenses on a scale ranging from £60 for a single man up to £120 for a man and wife with a family of four children.¹² The settlers were also expected to obtain basic foodstuffs such as meat, dairy products, and vegetables from the farm, while their life insurance, house electricity and motor car expenses were met from working expenses of the property.¹³ Despite the suggestion that the soldier settlers were receiving living allowances in the region of £72 per year, at least one budget prepared by the Department allowed only £30 per year out of an annual budget of £500.¹⁴

A divisive aspect to budgeting control, at least from the soldiers' perspective, was the inclusion in budgets of any amount that the soldier might have received by way of disability pension payments. The Department justified this practice on the grounds that 'it was important that mortgagors should rely on their own resources to the fullest extent'.¹⁵ Protests over the sacrosanct nature of the disability pension

Depression in New Zealand in the 1930s', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 21(2), 1987, p.244.

¹¹ Memo from the Commissioner of Crown Lands, North Auckland, to Undersecretary for Lands, 15 November 1933, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

¹² The Commissioner of Crown Lands, Canterbury, reported that living allowances were based on £6 per month for a married man without children. The allowance rose or fell according to the number of dependents, while settlers in remoter areas were given control of more funds. After a visit from the Minister to the district in 1931, it was decided that where a settler worked longer hours or where his wife and children assisted on the farm by milking extra cows, the Department would allow the settler to retain extra returns. This had implications for the position of wives and children and could be seen as negating the earlier policy of reducing the need for family labour by supplying milking machines, 21 November 1932, L&S file 22/3325/1, NA.

¹³ Memo from the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Wellington, to the Minister of Lands, 21 March 1935, L&S file 26/1-15, NA.

¹⁴ Memo from the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Canterbury, to the Undersecretary for Lands, 5 July 1932, State Advances file 29/4/2, NA.

¹⁵ Letter from the Minister of Lands to the General-Secretary, RSA, 21 September 1932, L&S file 26/1-14, NA.

were to no avail and, despite the Minister voicing some doubt as to the propriety of the practice, he eventually confirmed the policy.¹⁶

The soldiers' response to the depression had been to call for a reduction in their already subsidised interest rates and to seek a remission of all outstanding charges, and a revaluation of soldier properties held under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act and the State Advances Office.¹⁷ The Minister of Lands had declined a call for a further general revaluation of soldiers' farms in 1933 on the grounds that the unstable economic conditions provided no bench-mark upon which to establish values, and that a reduction in values would be to the detriment of the taxpayer should there be an increase in prices later.¹⁸ The findings of the 1934 Dairy Commission demonstrated the difficulties of many of the soldier settlers; of the 11,974 Crown tenants and mortgagors relying primarily on dairying, approximately half were in arrears with rent, with average an arrears of £100 per tenant, despite close supervision by the Department's field staff.¹⁹

Although the specific calls of the soldiers were disregarded, the policy of assistance was continued alongside similar assistance to civilians under the provisions of mortgage relief legislation which protected mortgagors from action by their creditors. The Department of Lands refrained from 'closing down' on the settlers who were trying their best under the adverse economic conditions. In the period 1932-1935 the sum of £844,348 was remitted from rents and interest arrears, while

¹⁶ Minute to the Undersecretary for Lands from the Minister of Lands, on a letter from the RSA, 21 November 1932, and a letter to the General-Secretary RSA, 13 February 1933, L&S file 26/1-14, NA.

¹⁷ Refer to various resolutions passed by the Dominion Council of the RSA, 1931-36, L&S file 26/1-14 and 26/1-15, NA.

¹⁸ Letter from the Minister of Lands to the General-Secretary of the RSA, 23 September 1933, L&S file 26/1-14, NA. The Government suspended all revaluation provisions of the 1924 Land Act until such time as commodity prices stabilised.

¹⁹ Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Dairy Industry in New Zealand, *AJHR*, H.30, 1934, pp.58-59. 45 per cent of mortgagors to the State Advances Department were in arrears, averaging £125 per farmer.

£768,605 of rent and mortgage instalments were postponed.²⁰ The Department was, however, concerned over 'the exceedingly difficult cases' where the position of the settler appeared hopeless and continued occupation of the properties by the settler required a subsidy. The matter was put before Cabinet on 6 June 1935, when it was decided to carry these men for another season and review the position in March 1936.²¹ The Acting Minister of Lands hoped that the threat of a review of the policy of assistance would 'have good results so far as the work of the settlers is concerned'.²² The incoming Labour Government continued the policy of seasonal advances for loss-making settlers through to 1937, while investigation of policies for the general rehabilitation of the farming community was undertaken. From this it is evident that soldier settlers could not lose their farms by government action as a consequence of economic misfortune throughout the period of the worst years of the slump.²³

The Department continued to work for the best interests of settlers *vis-à-vis* their private creditors and mortgagees, by both negotiating voluntary arrangements on behalf of soldiers, and using the power of foreclosure, originally suggested by Brodrick in 1921, as first mortgagor to sell up soldiers and then reinstate at more advantageous terms. A 1935 report noted: 'the Department has consistently viewed settlement under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act as a form of repatriation and so long as the settlers have done their best to carry out their obligations they have been given every possible consideration'.²⁴

²⁰ Memo from the Undersecretary for Lands to the Minister of lands, 12 December 1935, L&S file 26/1-15, NA.

²¹ Anticipation of the politically damaging impact of wholesale foreclosures just prior to the election would have weighed heavily upon the politicians.

²² Memo from the Undersecretary for Lands to the Minister of Lands, 27 April 1935, referred to Cabinet 6 June 1935, State Advances file 29/4/2, NA.

²³ The Commissioner of Crown Land for Canterbury, in reporting on half a dozen 'weak accounts' to the Undersecretary, observed, 'in view of the Hon. Minister's policy in connection with dispossessing settlers, action to close the accounts has not been taken', 26 June 1933, L&S file 26/1-15, NA.

²⁴ Report by Undersecretary for Lands to Frank Langstone, Labour Minister of Lands, 6 December 1935, L&S file 36/24, NA.

This attitude is explicable within the terms of the Government's policy for the rehabilitation of farming in general during the 1930s, but the fact remains that the ideal of special treatment for the soldiers was still motivating the policy of the Lands Department.

It was recognised by the Department that many of the soldiers, apparently in good health on arrival home, were suffering delayed health problems earlier in life than would have normally been expected and that this necessitated, according to the Undersecretary, that the services the soldiers' had rendered to the State be recognised by the method of administration of the land scheme.²⁵ The position of widows whose husbands died prematurely also required special attention. The Undersecretary for Lands argued in a briefing paper to the incoming Labour Government that the special expertise in dealing with the soldier settlers developed over the years by the Department was still required to administer the scheme, and that an intimate knowledge was required of each settler.²⁶ The field staff of the Department possessed this knowledge.

The soldiers admitted to their special position when, in 1935, the United Government proposed transferring the financial administration of the scheme to the market-oriented Mortgage Corporation which was to operate a much more conservative lending policy. The Morrinsville RSA claimed:

When the legislation of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act was first introduced in the House during the years of the war, Parliament considered that the soldier settler was worthy of special consideration; that the country would always be under a debt of gratitude to the returned soldiers; and that the Government of the day would see to it that New Zealand would be "fit for heroes to live in".²⁷

²⁵ Lands and Survey Briefing paper, 'Transfer of Securities to the Mortgage Corporation', L&S file 36/24, NA.

²⁶ Memo from the Undersecretary for Lands to the Minister of Lands, 12 December 1935, L&S file 26/1-15, NA.

²⁷ Letter from the Secretary, Morrinsville District RSA, E.A. Ransom, Minister of Lands, 27 March 1935, L&S file 26/1-15, NA.

The Minister declined to act upon a suggestion that a conference of soldier settlers be held to discuss the position, and took exception to claims of soldiers that they were struggling under miserable conditions while others might not have been doing so.²⁸ The President of the RSA put the soldiers' case to the Prime Minister, G.W. Forbes, claiming that soldier settlers had indicated a preference for staying 'under the protective wing of the Lands Department'. He observed that 'the Association hoped that as the Lands Department had functioned so justly between the public and the ex-soldier mortgagor that the latter would be allowed to remain under the administration of the Lands Department'.²⁹

That the soldiers were concerned was also indicative of the dependent relationship that had developed. They appeared comfortable with the assistance they had received and were no doubt aware that civilian farmers had not had the same degree of assistance in the face of economic difficulties. Reinforcing the view of soldier settlers that they could not expect the same special consideration in the civilian lending environment were comments of the Superintendent of the State Advances Office who, as early as 1924, informed Massey that:

I regret that it is not possible for the Advances Board to establish a rule that all applications received from returned soldiers for assistance should take precedence over those lodged by civilians.... it has to be remembered that six years have elapsed since the Great War ended and it is felt now, generally speaking, applications for loans both from the returned soldier and the civilian settler should receive the same treatment.³⁰

In the build-up to the 1935 election, W. Downie Stewart had criticised his former colleagues' plans for the Mortgage Corporation, claiming that the proposed operations of the Corporation could as easily be accommodated by an existing

²⁸ Letter from the Minister of Lands to the Morrinsville District RSA, 5 April 1935, L&S file 26/1-15, NA.

²⁹ Extract from the RSA Deputation to the Prime Minister, G.W. Forbes, and J.G. Cobbe, the Minister of Defence, 12 September 1935, L&S file 26/1-15, NA.

³⁰ Minute to Prime Minister Massey from W. Waddel, Superintendent of the State Advances Office, on a letter from the RSA documenting resolutions of its eighth annual conference, 11 October 1924, State Advances file 9/86, NA.

Department. An editorial in the *Press* defended the Government's plans on the grounds of improved efficiency by centralising the operations of three government lending departments, State Advances, Lands, and Rural Intermediate Credit Board, into one, and the removal of political interference. The paper claimed that a weakness of the existing system was that lending Departments were under direct political control and so were 'not always able to act on the principles of sound finance', while the Mortgage Corporation 'will be sufficiently far removed from politics to exercise an independent judgement'.³¹ From these comments it appeared that soldier settlers had good reason to fear for their special status.

Despite certain 'sweeteners' for rural electors, the United Government was ousted in the 1935 election.³² Promises by Labour to introduce a guaranteed price scheme appealed to small farmers more than a re-run of old policies. The election of Labour apparently saw an end to the proposed transfer of soldier settler mortgages to the semi-private Mortgage Corporation.³³ However, Walter Nash, the incoming Minister of Finance, decided after taking advice that control of soldier mortgages would pass to the proposed State Advances Corporation.³⁴ This decision was made despite strenuous efforts by the Department of Lands to protect its territory and, again with support from the RSA and the Farmers' Union, to retain control. Without success the Undersecretary for Lands argued:

³¹ *Press*, 26 October 1935, p.14.

³² The Coalition Government passed the Land Laws Amendment Act a month prior to the election. Under this legislation the revaluation provisions of the 1924 Land Act, which had been suspended until 1936 by the Reserves and Other Lands Disposal Act 1932-33, were reintroduced with applications for revaluation being dealt with by local committees and a central board. The reintroduction of revaluation provisions for almost all Crown tenants was defended by A. Ransom, Minister of Lands, as a policy to encourage economic recovery, *Press*, 23 October 1935, p.12, and 31 October 1935, p.12.

³³ During the election campaign Labour's leader, M.J. Savage, had outlined the party's proposal to amend the Mortgage Corporation Act so as to provide government control on the same lines as for the State Advances Department. Labour also intended amending the Rural Mortgage Final Adjustment Act so that it could take immediate power to begin rehabilitating farming with the object of enabling, in Savage's words, 'the farmer of average ability to meet his commitments under normal conditions'. *Press*, 21 October 1935, p.12.

³⁴ Memo from the Secretary to the Treasury to the Minister of Finance, 17 June 1936, L&S file 26/1-15, NA.

The settlement of returned soldiers is not ordinary land settlement: it is a special type of settlement requiring special knowledge and special methods.... It is the duty of the Country and the Government to see that the repatriation of soldiers is carried out to its finality... and should not be handed over to a semi-private Corporation.³⁵

In response to the Government's decision, the Te Awamutu RSA declared: 'We consider this to be a breach of faith. In the past soldier settlers have received sympathetic consideration from the Commissioner of Crown Lands'.³⁶ The Farmers' Union supported a continuation of the status quo.³⁷

The implications of the stand taken by the Department of Lands and by Nash are significant to our understanding of the attitudes governing the perceived position of the soldiers. Nash's decision is explicable in the context of his desire for economic efficiency and centralisation of the mortgage activities of the State under a single organisation. However, despite the obvious 'departmental politics' involved, at least some of the advice received suggested that the best interests of an especially deserving group of people were better served by retention of the status quo. In this light the moral question was shrouded by the imperative for economic efficiency. Nash informed the RSA that the Government was concerned to find the best way to manage in the interests of 'all'. They were to have no fear for the administration of the soldier settlement scheme, no matter which Department was responsible for administration, because 'the main thing is the policy of the Government.... If it is a case of policy, of determining what we want

³⁵ Memo from the Undersecretary for Lands to the Minister of Lands, 12 December 1935. The Undersecretary later informed the Minister that 'this Department has... held steadfastly to the opinion that within reasonable limits returned soldiers as a class need and deserve some measure of special consideration from the State. Memo from the Undersecretary for Lands to the Minister of Lands, 16 June 1936, L&S file 26/1-15, NA.

³⁶ The Secretary, Te Awamutu RSA, to the Minister of Lands, 18 March 1936, and 1 July 1936, L&S file 26/1-15, NA.

³⁷ Letter from the Dominion Secretary of the New Zealand Farmers' Union to the Minister of Lands, 18 February 1936, L&S file 26/1-15, NA.

done, the Government will determine it'.³⁸ Frank Langstone, the Labour Minister of Lands, expressed a different sentiment when he informed the RSA that:

The keynote was repatriation, and not the lending of money so far as the Lands Department was concerned - it was a question of trying to repatriate the men and helping them make good *in return for services rendered*.³⁹(emphasis added)

Langstone's statement reflects the soldiers' eventual capture of the ideological high ground. As a recent historian has observed, the soldiers had become cultural icons 'because the extent of the sacrifice necessitated the existence of a justification with which to reassure society that it had been worth the pain'.⁴⁰

The issues affecting soldier settlers in the period up to 1940 continued to revolve around the value of land, financial assistance, and section size. The various pieces of mortgage relief legislation introduced progressively through the early 1930s and culminating in the Mortgagors and Lessees Rehabilitation Act, 1936, affected the soldiers in much the same way as other mortgagors. However, the position was somewhat different for Crown tenants in that a ruling of the Court of Review dictated that the Adjustment Commissions could not effect a change in the capital values of properties. This meant that those soldier settlers with right-of-purchase options on their leases could not freehold their properties at the lower values on which rentals had been established. The RSA took exception to this state of affairs because it felt that those men who were nearing retirement deserved to be able to freehold their properties so as to obtain the greatest value for their improvements, and thus enjoy the same capital gains that other farmers had enjoyed. The position was complicated by the Department of Land's action, inspired by Labour's economic philosophies, of moving to protect what it saw as the best interests of the

³⁸ Nash's reply to a deputation of the RSA in Wellington, 28 May 1936, L&S file 26/1-15, NA.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Russell Clarke, 'Not Mad But Very Ill: The Treatment of New Zealand's Shell Shocked Soldiers 1914-1939', MA thesis in History, University of Auckland, 1991.

State by sustaining values through the re-established operations of the Revaluation Board. In some cases the revaluation process actually increased the unimproved value of sections and effectively ate into the soldiers' equity, as represented by the difference between unimproved and improved values of sections.⁴¹ The position was further complicated by the different interests of the mortgagee, as represented by State Advances, and the Department of Lands as lessee.

The final ameliorative policy pursued by the Government specifically for soldier settlers was the amalgamation of uneconomic farms. This appears to have occurred primarily in the Canterbury district. Allan provides an appraisal of amalgamation operations in his thesis, and he credits D. Barnes, former Member for Waitaki and first Director of the State Advances Corporation, with the development and implementation of the policy.⁴² A conference was held in Christchurch in May 1939 at which it was decided to establish three committees to implement a program of amalgamation. Staff from the Department of Lands and State Advances made up an 'allocation committee', which was responsible for the surrender of leases, while a 'selection committee', including the former government representatives but with the addition of representatives of the RSA and Pension Department, was established to deal with the personal element. A third committee was established to arbitrate between the first two committees over contested valuations.⁴³ According to Allan some twenty-five farms were dealt with during the year the policy was pursued.⁴⁴ In practice the departing soldier settlers received a small

⁴¹ An example of an exception to this was provided by the actions of the Undersecretary in 1939 when he ordered a special revaluation on a soldier's property under section 216 of the 1924 Land Act. The soldier in question had not applied for assistance under the 1936 *Mortgagors and Lessees Rehabilitation Act*. The result of the revaluation was a reduction in the Crown's capital value from £3,416 to £2,420. L&S file 26/9246, NA.

⁴² Allan, 'The Resettlement of Discharged Soldiers', p.121.

⁴³ Memo from the Undersecretary for Lands to the Minister of Lands, 5 May 1939, L&S file 26/1-16, NA.

⁴⁴ Allan, 'The Resettlement of Discharged Soldiers', p.119.

payment of approximately £200 to see them into a new position. Some had held out for larger sums, claiming that they deserved more after their years of struggle. However, their debt levels had remained high, which negated the value of improvements on the properties.

It can be seen that those soldiers who were struggling under the economic pressures of the depression were in fact isolated from the ultimate sanction, namely forfeiture or foreclosure. Far from being deserted by government during the depression, they were kept, nurtured and maintained by government assistance, albeit, in some cases, in little above subsistence farming conditions.⁴⁵ This does not make them stand out dramatically from other farmers, as it has been argued that throughout the 'thirties government policy was essentially aimed at protecting the farming sector from the ravages of slumping prices and overvalued land⁴⁶ and, in the language of the times, 'keeping the efficient farmer on the land'. But it must be questioned whether, in fact, the 30 per cent of Crown Land soldier settlers requiring special budgeting assistance could ever be called 'efficient' farmers. Their survival and continuing occupation of their farms was a reflection of the nation's debt of gratitude.

⁴⁵ Report from the North Canterbury Adjustment Commission, 1938, J1, 1938/2/103, NA; cited in Macdonald and Thomson, 'Mortgage Relief', p.247.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.228.

LAST POST

CHAPTER 15

FAILURE QUANTIFIED?

The historiography tells us that soldier settlement was a failure and figures have been presented in the literature to show the degree of this failure and the cost in financial terms. The actual cost to the country of the farm component of the settlement scheme was determined in 1940 at £8.3 million.¹ B.D.A. Greig, in his 1940 Treasury report on the rehabilitation of soldiers, called this financial result a disaster, but, as he noted, the money losses could be legitimately considered as a cost of war.² Absent from the literature, however, are any significant attempts to quantify the degree of failure in terms of the number of soldiers who survived on their properties (see page 37 above). Without reference to the contextual fabric of the Crown lease and general land acquisition environment, later writers have estimated rates of departure from the land by soldiers and inferred that the scheme was a failure. What then of the soldiers' survival rate over time? Was this so poor as to support the historians' views that the scheme was a disaster in social planning? This chapter attempts to provide a quantitative view of the scheme over time and to determine whether soldiers left the land to the extent believed by contemporaries. Raw figures of the number of soldiers in possession of farms at different dates do not necessarily constitute evidence of success or failure and, as the work of Marilyn Lake on Victoria has shown, the quality of life of the settlers and their families is an important component in the equation.³ This thesis does not deny the often difficult personal experiences of individual soldier settlers and their families during the interwar period but, in terms of the New Zealand image of the

¹ Memo from the Undersecretary for Lands to the Minister of Lands, 5 June 1940, L&S file 36/24, NA.

² Treasury Report on the Rehabilitation of Returned Men of the Forces, Treasury file 25/146-155, p.15, NA.

³ Lake, *The Limits of Hope*.

'walk off' by soldier settlers, numbers and dates are central. The image of the failure of the soldier settlement scheme is tied closely to the attitudes held by the community towards its obligation to reward the soldiers. These attitudes were affected by the Government's political concern to be seen to be doing the best for the soldiers, and the public pressure which motivated this concern. While imagery remains difficult to quantify, raw figures detailing the fate of soldier settlers are useful in ascertaining both the contemporary image of failure, and subsequent writers' views. Table 4 is a compilation of various published figures from the annual reports of the Department of Lands and represents the 'official' dynamics of the scheme.

Table 4. Total Applications and Holdings of Soldier Farms

YEAR	a	b	c	d	e	f	g
1916	2		2		272	2	2
1917	320	24	344		522	319	321
1918	596	42	638	263*	513	313	634
1919	896	185	1081	4107	1379	348	982
1920	1780	683	2463	5331	5041	932	1914
1921	2729	1212	3941	5443	5396	1087	3001
1922	3014	1799	4813	5489	878	403	3404
1923	3090	1791	4881	5498	284	146	3550
1924	3077	1842	4919	5507	216	79	3629
1925	2968	1825	4793	5511	123	47	3676
1926	2926	1792	4718		109	86	3762
1927	2882	1748	4630		78	66	3828
1928	289	1636	4498		96	60	3888
1929	2838	1680	4518		90	77	3965
1930	2822	1678	4500		63	53	4018
1931	2784	1685	4469		41	31	4049
1932	2783	1691	4474		22	16	4065
1933	2727	1658	4385	3990h	12	6	4071
1934	2711	1720	4431	4423	10	8	4079
1935	2695	1703	4398		8	7	4086
1936	2686	1695	4312		12	7	4093
1937	2591	1700	4291		8	8	4101
1938	2575	1696	4271		1	4*	4105
1939	2556	1685	4241		1	1	4106
1940	2540	1683	4223		2	2	4108

The first, and obvious point is that the table 4 figures portray a highly successful settlement scheme. If these figures are believed the settlement of soldiers on Crown Land reached a high point in 1924 (4,919) and, between that date and 1940 the total declined by only 696 to 4,223. This would suggest a success rate of 85 per cent. The published figures for section 2 settlement continually rose from 1919 to 1926 suggesting that none of the settlers left the land during that period. These official figures, therefore, are not an accurate reflection of the state of the soldier settlement scheme over time. This negates one obvious test for failure of the scheme which is to count the official presentation of the numbers involved. The problems associated with doing this may be the reason historians have avoided it, allowing generalists to repeat the standard story. The published material in the official reports is at best confusing. The emphasis was on the total numbers of individual soldiers settled, and the financial outlay which was to indicate the degree of government assistance to the soldiers, not the cost to the taxpayer. The changing and increasing expenditure figures were published on an annual basis, but comprehensive figures detailing the number of settlers leaving the land were not. Even the apparently straightforward published official figures of total soldiers settled, as presented in table 4, disguise a complex of different land acquisition methods under various pieces of legislation. The lack of readily available statistics contributed to the confusion experienced both by contemporaries and later writers.

Despite frequent requests for information from Members of Parliament and the RSA, the response of the Department of Lands was most often to refer questioners to the published Annual Reports, or to suggest that a lack of staff made it impossible to prepare a reply. Questions asked in the House of Representatives by Members required specific answers, but the inquiries were, for the most part, related to fringe regional or interest group issues and did not address the major issue of success or failure. The statistics of financial losses provided fuel for the later, and damning, Treasury-inspired criticism of the economics of the scheme by the first Labour Government.

The conclusions arrived at here are based on the following figures, which have emerged from archival research and a re-evaluation of the published record.⁴ The difficulty experienced with establishing the accuracy of these figures mirrors the problems faced by contemporaries, and the figures are not vouched for as a completely accurate description of the scheme.

Table 5 shows the overall scope of the scheme and indicates the number of soldier settlers who appear to have succumbed to early establishment problems and the 1921 depression. Although the number of soldier farms established, which in the literature is variously given as being in the vicinity of 9,500, can be determined with some accuracy, the actual turn-over rate is more difficult to arrive at.

Table 5.

Total Farms Occupied by Discharged Soldier Settlers: From the Inception of the Scheme Until:

	Men	Farms
31 March 1924	10552	9635
Holdings as at 31 March 1924 ⁵	9341	8484

⁴ See Lands and Survey File 36/24, NA. Figures supplied to the Governor-General for his quarterly secret dispatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies show 1,419 Crown leases. See L&S file 26/1/112, NA.

⁵ Report prepared for the Minister of Lands stating the position of the scheme as at 31 March 1924, after the worst years of the post-war depression and prior to the operations of the Dominion Revaluation Board, L&S file 36/26.

Table 6 provides a breakdown of the distribution of soldier settlers in 1924 by the type of land tenure under which their farms were obtained.

Table 6.
Tenure Categories of Soldier Farms Held as at 31 March 1924

Farms	
3009	Crown leases under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act.
430	Crown leases under the Land, and Land for Settlements Acts.
1400	Crown leases purchased under section 2.
3645	Freehold properties purchased under section 2 1917 Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act. ⁶

Table 7 shows the distribution by tenure type of the properties that soldier settlers left and the type of departure that was either forced upon them by the Department of Lands, or which they undertook voluntarily.

Table 7. **Abandoned Soldier Farms as at 31 March 1924⁷**

Farms	
610	Section 2 farms
201	Surrendered leaseholds ⁸
324	Forfeited leaseholds
60	Soldiers died (excluded from walk off figure)
670	Transfers (85 per cent to other soldiers)

⁶ A return to an enquiry in 1935 revealed that the total number of soldiers assisted under section 2 of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act, 1917 to purchase freehold sections amounted to 4423, letter from Undersecretary of Lands to J. Crawford, 12 September 1935, L&S file 26/1-15, NA.

⁷ A return prepared by the Department of Lands for the 1925 Royal Commission on Soldier settlement in Victoria indicated that the figure was greater, with 520 properties being forfeited or surrendered, while the lesser figure of 470 had been abandoned.

⁸ Surrender of leases was normally carried out at the request of the leaseholder and, in the New Zealand case, was also used as a mechanism for varying the terms of the lease by having a new lease issued to the tenant on surrender of the previous lease.

Of the total number of abandoned farms, 142 section 2 properties and 179 Crown leaseholds had been re-selected as at 31 March 1924. From these figures an estimated departure rate up to 1924 can be calculated at 1,211 soldiers leaving 1,135 farms (including partnerships), or, 11 per cent of the total allotted farms. A worst-case estimation that assumes all who left were failures would have 1941 soldiers leaving 1805 farms for an 18 per cent departure rate.

It must be noted that these figures and those contained in Table 4. may also include multiple occupancies of sections over time. Examples have emerged from both the departmental files, and the history of the Mangateparu settlement, to suggest that although the total number of soldiers in possession is represented by the above figures, these do not show the actual turnover between soldiers. As an example, between 1917 and 1921, the lease of section 25 of the Heatherly settlement near Levin was occupied by three soldiers in turn, (one of whom died in possession), and the dead soldier's wife. The settler who farmed it through the 1920s and 1930s took possession in March 1922.⁹ Section 8, block III, of the Whirinaki survey district was selected by William Hall on 25 January 1917, and surrendered on 28 February 1918, when approval was given to W.T.Davis to occupy the section. Davis became a committed patient during early 1921 and the section was forfeited. On 27 April 1921 the property was transferred to Percival Cootes, who farmed the property until at least 1945.¹⁰ That soldiers continued to acquire holdings is shown by a 1927 report which indicated that, of the 206 forfeited Crown sections reselected in the four years up to 31 March 1927, 147 were selected by soldiers and 59 by civilians.¹¹ Multiple tenancies may hide the true extent of soldier settlement making the figure of 10,500 soldiers settlement an under-estimate.

⁹ L&S file 26/17358, NA.

¹⁰ L&S file 26/2476, NA.

¹¹ L&S file 26/274/64, NA. The average difference in the capital values from the first settler to the second amounted to £788. This suggests that the Crown, in the face of uncertain economic conditions, was lowering its expectations of recovering debt loadings on properties which were abandoned or transferred.

Alternative sources of figures which quantified the soldier settlement scheme emerged from the archival material. For example, in 1925 the Prime Minister, Sir Francis Bell, supplied the following figures of the scale of the settlement scheme in New Zealand to the Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement in Victoria. As at 30 June 1924, 9621 soldiers held 4,144,852 acres in the following categories:¹²

3,788	settled on Crown properties, including section 3, National Endowment, and ordinary Crown Land, 2,899,731 acres in area.
1,427	section 2 leasehold purchases, 601,702 acres in area.
4,406	Private freehold section 2 purchases, 634,419 acres in area.

9,621	

These figures also reveal that 5,215 soldiers, or 54 per cent of the soldier farmers had Crown leaseholds. This compares with the figure of 4,919 previously quoted by the Minister and also published in the official records. For comparison with the above, the following figures were published in the *Press* in February 1922 from an unacknowledged source:¹³

2,095	settled on settlement land
1,746	settled on existing Crown Land
4,057	section 2 freehold or native land purchases
1,105	section 2 Crown lease purchases
496	section 2 advances to discharge existing mortgages

9,499	

The difference in the totals between the two sources cannot be dismissed out of hand, as it is probable, despite the cessation of the general scheme in 1921, that

¹² Letter from the Prime Minister, Sir Francis Bell, to the Premier of Victoria, 21 February 1925, L&S file 26/1-10, NA.

¹³ *Press*, 27 February 1922, p.6.

122 soldiers were assisted in the intervening two years. The later figures appear to combine section 2 leasehold purchases and section 2 advances to discharge existing mortgages, but the total for Crown sections involved declines from 5,215 to 4,946. These figures seem to represent individual accounts and it is probable that the figure of 9,499 was intended to represent the number of farms dealt with under the scheme, and not the number of individual soldiers.

What of the rates of survival, or success, over time? These figures are more difficult to tease from the record, but the following figures give an approximation. The Enquiry Boards had found in 1923 that, of the 4,300 farms that were inspected out of a possible total of 7,635: 50.6 were successful; 30.7 were unsuccessful; 18.7 per cent were failures.¹⁴

The figure of 7,635 possible farms entitled to inspection appears to represent farms held by original selectors and does not include those listed under abandoned farms noted above. These figures show a close correlation with those listed below for the survival rate over time, which suggests that soldier settlers facing problems in the early phase of settlement continued to suffer, despite government relief measures. Those represented by the figure of 30.7 per cent for partial failures appear to be the settlers who continued to need assistance through the depression by budget control, while it is likely that those termed successful in 1923 did continue to occupy their properties for appreciable lengths of time.

Table 8. Farms Held by Soldier Settlers as at 31 March 1934

2,711	Crown leases under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act
1,720	Crown leases under other acts, and section 2 leasehold
2,270	Section 2 freehold titles

6,701	Total farms occupied by soldiers. ¹⁵

¹⁴ Summaries of Reports of Enquiry Boards, *AJHR*, C.9a, Part A, 1923, p.22.

¹⁵ Memo from the Undersecretary for Lands to the Minister of Lands, 17 April 1935, L&S file 36/24, NA. These represent farms over which the Government still exercised a financial interest by way of Crown lease, or mortgage advances.

According to the table 8 figures, by 1934 2,934 or 30 per cent of the original 9,635 farms, were either paid off or no longer held by soldiers. Civilians were in possession of some 1,500, while a number were still held unoccupied by the Department of Lands.¹⁶ Most of the departures or failures in the period 1924-1934 occurred in the section 2 freehold group - that is, among soldiers who had bought existing farms on their own initiative. Civilians began to acquire soldier farms almost immediately following the arrival of the 1921 depression. As at July 1925, civilians held 361 properties previously held by soldiers under section 2, and by 3 September 1928, civilians held 979 section 2 properties with Crown mortgages to the value of £1,144,000 outstanding.¹⁷ The ten-year restriction on re-sale of soldier properties, which had been circumvented in exceptional cases with Land Board approval, expired for many of the settlers in the late 1920s and this contributed to the increased turnover of soldier properties.¹⁸

An explanatory paragraph in a memorandum from the Undersecretary to the Minister of Lands noted that the difference between the figure of 6,701 soldiers holding farms in 1934, and the total farms settled, which was given as 9,635, was accounted for by transfers to civilians, or where civilians had selected forfeited and foreclosed land, or where the loans on properties had been redeemed. It was noted that civilians held 1,569 rural mortgages. This memorandum explicitly states that 6,701 soldiers were still in possession of their properties.¹⁹

¹⁶ Figures of farms held for disposal were not obvious although the *New Zealand Farmer Stock and Station Journal*, p.1295, noted in September 1926 that the Department held 677 freehold and leasehold farms for disposal. The Annual Report of the Unemployment Board noted that in 1931 there were 400 abandoned farms in various parts of the country. These properties were not necessarily soldiers' farms. *AJHR*, H.35, 1931, p.19.

¹⁷ L&S file 26/274/76, NA. Of these properties, 349 were transfers and 630 were abandoned farms sold by the Department to civilians.

¹⁸ In an attempt to stop speculation with land set aside for soldier settlers, the original 1915 Act had placed an embargo of ten years upon the transfer of farms. The regional Land Boards could use their discretion, however, and approve transfers in special cases. The figures quoted above indicate that 630 transfers, or a little over 6 per cent of the total soldier farms, had been approved by 1924.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

A request in 1934 from W. Perry, Member of the Legislative Council, for statistics quantifying the state of soldier settlement elicited from the Minister of Lands figures of 9,506 soldiers settled on rural land, while the Minister 'estimated' that approximately 7,000 remained on their properties as at 30 October, 1934.²⁰ However, a 1935 report on the proposal to transfer the soldier mortgages held by the Department of Lands to the Mortgage Corporation indicated that, as at 30 June 1935, 6,032 farms were under mortgage to the Department, while 2,970 current account mortgages were still extant.²¹ A memorandum dated 2 April 1936 indicated that the figure of 6,032 farms referred solely to mortgage transactions under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act and did not account for soldiers who were settled under the Land for Settlements, and Land Acts, or under other Acts. (The figure of 6,032 was made up of properties purchased under section 2, of the 1917 Amendment act and those soldiers who had acquired Crown Land with a right of purchase clause which was subsequently changed, after the 1921 depression, into a table mortgage.) More significantly, the figure also included 1,512 civilians who had taken over soldier mortgages. This appears to be the source of Greig's estimate of 29 per cent of soldier mortgages in the hands of civilians in 1935,²² cited by Boyack and Tolerton.²³

These figures have significant implications for an overall view of the survival rate of soldiers settled under the scheme. First, the figure of 6,032 mortgages must include an unknown number of Crown tenants. The official published figures for these in table 4 above indicate that 4,398 soldiers held Crown land on lease as at 31 March 1935. Some of these properties must have been covered by mortgages for improvements and stock held against the value of the lessees' improvements, as the Crown would not mortgage its own land. By removing the civilian-held mortgages, we are left with a possible 4,520 actual soldier-held farm mortgages.

²⁰ Telegram from the Minister of Lands to W. Perry, 30 October 1934, L&S file 26/1-15, NA.

²¹ Report from the Department of Lands, no date, L&S file 36/24, NA.

²² Treasury Report on the Rehabilitation of Returned Men of the Forces, Treasury file 25/146-155, p.14, NA.

²³ Boyack and Tolerton, *In The Shadow of War*, p.247.

Both the 1936 memorandum and Greig, indicated that 2,852 current account mortgages were extant for soldiers, but the memorandum indicated that 2,020 of these were also held by the 4,520 soldier mortgagees. The balance of 850 appears to be held by Crown tenants who were not covered by mortgages against improvements. From these figures we would get a survival figure for soldiers still financially involved with the Department, as at 30 June 1935, of approximately 5,370 which is somewhat different to the published figures and those revealed from other archival sources, and noted above. This figure, however, does not account for soldiers still in possession of properties originally purchased for cash, or those subsequently freeholded after the repayment of mortgages, and may underestimate the number of Crown tenants without current accounts. By adding the civilian-held properties, we are left with a figure close to the total of 7,000 given by the Minister in 1935.

Figures showing the relative departure or failure rate among different types of pastoral farms are not available, although a detailed report was prepared for the Commission of Enquiry into Soldier Re-establishment in 1929 on the status of those soldier settlers who had acquired small properties for orcharding, poultry raising, and market gardens. This report shows that by August 1928, 179 or 24 per cent of a total 722 in this category, had, in the report's words, failed. No criteria for failure were provided, but it appeared to be based on the retention of tenure.

Table 9. Soldiers Holding Small Sections Near Towns.²⁴

Class of section	Holdings	failures	Percentage
Poultry	164	62	37.8
Small Fruit	120	23	19.2
Market Gardens	130	17	13.0
Miscellaneous	308	77	24.0

	722	179	24.0

²⁴ Return of Soldiers Taking up Small Sections, L&S file 36/24: L&S file 26/1-13, NA.

The three largest concentrations of this class of settler were in Canterbury, (209); North Auckland [including Auckland city and environs], (181); Wellington, (125). The highest rate of failure was recorded for the poultry farmers in the Wellington Land District, where 73 per cent of the 49 established failed.

The figures above suggest that approximately 50-65 per cent of soldier settlers still survived on their properties in the late 1930s, and raises the question of how success and failure are to be measured, and from what standpoint these are to be determined? That there were still at least half of the soldier settlers on the land is obvious from these statistics, yet an influential paper by Horace Belshaw, presented to the Auckland and Hamilton Chambers of Commerce, and the National Industrial Conference in 1928, and later published in the *Economic Record*, suggests by implication that few of the soldiers had survived, although he was referring to the farming community in general. Belshaw observed:

*Those who bought[land]during the years 1919-22 are in an intolerable position, if they have not already "walked off" their farms.[his emphasis]*²⁵

The impact of such statements on the public cannot be underestimated, although W.J. Polson, President of the New Zealand Farmers' Union, was reported as disagreeing with Belshaw. Polson suggested that Belshaw's figures 'were based on guess work' because he[Polson] 'had studied the question of land inflation for a number of years'.²⁶

²⁵ H. Belshaw, 'The Economic Position of the Farmer': Report of the National Industrial Conference, *AJHR*, H.35, 1928, p.30.

²⁶ *Evening Post*, 29 March, 1928, p.7. These comments need to be seen in the context of the Farmers' Union contention at the National Industrial Conference that the plight of primary producers was the result of the Arbitration Court awarding too great a proportion of the country's wealth to wage workers. In this light Belshaw's claims that the problems were structural, and within the country/farming/landowning sector, were sure to bring complaint. A correspondent to the *New Zealand Herald*, in response to the Industrial Conference, complained that most of the farmers of the late 'twenties had also been the same farmers prior to the boom, and 'it is common knowledge that less than a third of the farms changed hands during the boom', *New Zealand Herald*, 28 March 1928, p.16.

In terms of the development of the historiography, statements such as those by Belshaw were highly significant. It is obvious that to substantiate the failure hypothesis later writers have taken figures from the official record and implied that these show failure. Yet without a quantitative study of all soldier farms, an objective answer cannot be arrived at. My estimate of some 6,700 soldiers surviving on their properties through two depressions and fifteen years of economic turmoil does not provide superficial support for the claim that the settlement scheme was 'one of the greatest disasters in social planning New Zealand has ever known'.²⁷

This conclusion also raises the question of the impact of the central North Island bush settlements on the historical image of soldier settlement. Although no attempt has been made to quantify the experience of the bush land settlers, some observations can be made. The experience of Mangapurua is likely to have been repeated in other marginal bush areas in the North Island, but without the sense of finality that is apparent with the 'Bridge to Nowhere' settlement. A similar situation of high departure arose in the West Coast and Nelson districts, and a return to Parliament in October 1929 suggested that 45 per cent of the 413 settlers in the Collingwood, Takaka, Waimea, Murchison, Buller, and Inangahua Counties had departed by that date, while the Crown held 31 properties which were unoccupied.²⁸

As suggested in the introduction, the tenor of the early debate about the soldier settlement scheme embraced ideas based on eugenics, on the centrality of the rural myth and rural arcadianism, and on the impact of war. To use Paul Johnson's description, the 'reconstructionist' element in New Zealand saw great possibilities for land reform stemming from the war. Contemporaries, particularly the Liberal left, were highly critical of the Government's policy, not for what little was achieved, but for what might have been achieved, unrealistic as these expectations

²⁷ Sinclair, *The Oxford Illustrated History*, p.205.

²⁸ Return to Order 117, 17 October 1929, Legislative Series file 1/1929/236, NA.

may have been. The war had inculcated the belief in the unlimited possibilities for the future. The soldiers were to be at the forefront of the battle to settle more closely the remaining Crown Land within the country, and to carry the workers' struggle to the large landowners. The scheme was also justified on the grounds of improving national wealth - it was to be good for the country as well as the soldiers. Neither would prove to be the case. This was the legacy of the war. The soldiers did not become the independent yeoman envisaged by the proponents of the scheme, nor did the soldiers achieve, at least in any number, the competence of an independent rural existence. They were in fact trapped in a web of debt and spiralling costs, and they required almost constant financial relief. But, according to society, they were not personally to blame for their position; it was 'through no fault of their own'. Measured against the hopes of the proponents and the participants the results were poor and scape-goats were sought.

The Labour/Liberal press had no doubt about where the fault lay and who were the culpable parties - the traditional enemies of the working class - the landowners, particularly the wealthy, aided and abetted by the farmers' government of the Reform Party. Because the deservedness of the soldiers could not be denied, contemporary criticism centred primarily on the cost of land and the Reform Government's role in creating the land boom. Nor could the prospect of a land settlement scheme which addressed the need to reward soldiers, worked for closer settlement, and increased production, be attacked in itself. As was noted above, the Liberal newspapers did not completely hold the field, although their superficial cause - the returned soldiers - certainly held the high moral ground. However, alternative views were in circulation and in 1924 the *Taranaki Herald*, in response to public interest in the establishment of the Dominion Revaluation Board, published a particularly convincing view of the soldier settlement scheme. It claimed:

Doubtless there are many of these soldier settlers who from want of experience, or from physical unfitness would have been wiser to have engaged in some other occupation. But after their campaigning experiences they felt they could not settle down inside. They had

plenty of pluck if they lacked experience; and the Government, with the full approval of the people, gave them the opportunity. Neither the men nor the Government are to be blamed and there is nothing to be gained by blaming them for what has been done.²⁹

Perversely, later complaints - by the Liberal press, Greig's 1940 report, and the 1941 Labour Party election pamphlet for servicemen - that centred upon the financial cost to the country, were actually denying earlier claims that the financial cost was irrelevant to the greater need to adequately reward the soldiers for their service. By introducing the money aspect they were actually belittling the sacrifice for which the soldiers were being rewarded. However, as Greig rightly noted, only a small proportion of discharged soldiers actually enjoyed the benefit of the scheme.

Can one generalise about the view the soldiers' had of their position? These are difficult to determine. The RSA had clear views, but these were, in part, a product of its lobbying activities. Did the struggling soldier settlers see themselves personally as failures, or victims? The latter is more likely and letters on personal files reveal the common usage of the catch phrase 'through no fault of my own'. Boyack and Tolerton picture the soldier settlers as victims of a system that betrayed them, although this betrayal had begun with the war itself. An image of betrayal is also captured by Mulgan's character, Johnson, where he describes the peace, 'the bit in between', as worse than the war.

The notion that the soldiers were passive victims is also strongly represented in the historiography. Statements such as, 'many of the buyers and lessees... found themselves on rough hill country, in virgin bush, remote, isolated, and without roads'³⁰, or, 'soldiers were placed on sections that were too small, or too rough', suggests there was no element of personal agency involved on the part of the soldier. This argument relies on the notion that the soldiers were completely

²⁹ *Taranaki Herald*, 13 May 1924, clipping on L&S file 26/274/64, NA.

³⁰ K. Cumberland, *Landmarks*, p.157.

inexperienced and were allowing the Crown to wholly dictate their location of settlement. The evidence presented in chapter 9 above suggests that this was not the case and that soldier settlers were expected to meet qualifying criteria, one of which was that they had inspected the property and were satisfied that it matched their expectations.

Both George and Allan use figures from the 'Soldiers' Register' in an attempt to quantify the failure rate. As has been noted, there are shortcomings to this method, not the least because reasons for the forfeiture and surrender of properties are not entered in the register. Without contextualising individual cases, the use of these figures is misleading. A survey of the *New Zealand Gazette* entries for those soldiers forfeiting sections shows that a simple description such as 'non-compliance with terms of lease' was the norm.³¹ Did the men who left their farms in a comparatively short time actually feel they had lost anything, apart from some capital? The Director of Canadian Soldier Settlement observed that the value of land settlement should also be seen in therapeutic terms, in the time it provided the veteran to recover from the effects of war service and decide on his future occupation and place of living.³²

Little mention is made in the literature of the men who wanted give up farming because they found they did not like the life.³³ Allen Maxwell, a settler on the Mangateparu settlement, wrote to Prime Minister Coates complaining that the ten-year restriction on transfer of soldier farms

was a gross injustice; for in many instances the settler found out after a year or so at the game, that he was not suitable for the life,

³¹ For example, two of the successful balloters for the Kopane settlement applied within days for the surrender of their properties. These were recorded as official surrenders, Wellington Land Board minutes, 28 March 1918, L&S-W 12/17, NA.

³² cited in Black and Hyson, 'Post-War Soldier Settlement', p.7.

³³ Elsie Locke, *The Kauri and the Willow*, Wellington, 1984, pp.153-154, quotes a returned soldier and former school teacher: 'I saw it[the war] through and then I was too restless for teaching. Three of us cobbles set up a farm. It was a daft thing to do, because I was the only one with experience, and that was no more than milking the house cow as a boy. We lasted a year. A few more short jobs and I was ready for my life's work -yes, teaching'.

nor, the life suitable for him. Which meant that he was forced to walk off, being unable to claim compensation for his own work, or return for such private money as he may have spent on improvements.³⁴

This is revealing, both that the soldiers were not all happy being farmers, and that administrative structures appeared to encourage the men to walk off or abandon, as they could not recover their investment.³⁵ Their personal decision, however, ran counter to the pervasive ethos of the rural myth, as it has been interpreted more recently.

Unless later writers were to find fault with the soldiers as individuals, the scheme itself had to be painted as flawed. The soldiers who walked off in fact had status conferred on them. Implicit in deeply-held ideas of rural arcadia and gaining a competency was the assumption that no-one would voluntarily relinquish their opportunity to acquire a family farm, the rural ideal. The image of land acquisition as being a natural corollary to the establishment of a multi-generational rural family farm, which is implicit in later writers' condemnation of the scheme, may require modification.³⁶ This observation is supported by Waterson's study of the Matamata Estate between 1904 and 1959, which shows the high turn-over of settlers under an earlier settlement scheme.³⁷ The very nature of the land boom during and immediately after the war is also revealing in this respect as some New Zealanders appeared to be farming land values rather than commodities.³⁸

³⁴ Letter from Allen Maxwell to Gordon Coates, 12 November 1925, L&S file 21/102, NA.

³⁵ The Department's early view was that the soldier settlers had to meet their loan commitments as a first priority before they could recover any surplus capital for themselves.

³⁶ This ideal of the family farm is questioned in Belshaw et al, *Agricultural Organisation*, p.185.

³⁷ D.B. Waterson, 'The Matamata Estate, 1904-1959: Land transfers and subdivision in the Waikato', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 3(1), 1969, pp.32-51. For examples of high turnovers of Crown holdings see also, W.H. Scotter, *Run, Estate and Farm: A History of the Kakanui and Waireka Valleys, North Otago*, Dunedin, 1948, p.56; A.G. Bagnall, *Wairarapa: An Historical Excursion*, Masterton, 1976, p.279.

³⁸ Belshaw, 'Agricultural Credit', pp.76-83.

What of the alternative schemes such as colony-type settlements which were suggested by contemporaries? Obvious problems existed for the suggestion by George that different policies should have been pursued.³⁹ No matter what the alternative views put forward by contemporaries, the soldiers were still going to be mainly young, inexperienced, and undercapitalised. The Government could not have introduced a scheme of free grants, or very cheap land, because it would have been overwhelmed with applicants, nor would this have been politically acceptable, quite apart from a shortage of available land. Whatever system was established, novice farmers were going to face difficulties at times of depression.⁴⁰ It was also politically unacceptable to insist that all applicants possess substantial capital and previous experience. Most of the soldiers had not been farmers, although they may have been familiar with the rural environment, nor did they possess substantial capital. Any alternative scheme would have had to address these problems.

Problems of administration are commented upon directly by Greig but other writers have also implied criticism. The evidence shows that the Government did not appreciate the extent of the soldiers' demands upon the staff of the Department of Lands. The contemporary criticism was an argument between central and regional control, local and particular, versus red-tape and bureaucracy. The merits of the personal component of the Land Boards' administration of the scheme has been lost in the later claims of financial inefficiency. Yet contemporaries wanted an even greater say for the community in the settlement programme. The major problem with administration of the scheme was that it was expected to meet two conflicting agendas. Soldier settlement was a political issue, hence the assurances by politicians that men without capital and experience would get assistance, notwithstanding that this was inimical to commonsense administration of land settlement. To have maintained standards operative under 'normal' conditions would have been in direct conflict with the aims of the scheme. The Department

³⁹ George, 'The Depression of 1921-22', p.170.

⁴⁰ British Columbia's experiment with development colonies failed when the provincial government withdrew funding for what essentially became a non-paying proposition. See Paul Korocil, 'Soldiers, Settlement, and Development in British Columbia, 1915-1930', *BC Studies*, 54, 1982, p.82.

of Lands can be criticised for attempting to craft land settlement methods designed to cope with less than 2,000 applicants per year into a scheme to settle some 10,000 in a little over two years. Not only were there greater numbers of settlers, but the evidence suggests that soldier settlers also required substantially more assistance from the Department in the initial stages of settlement. Furthermore, policies put in place by the Department to protect soldiers from unscrupulous stock-dealers loaded extra responsibilities upon the few Rangers and Supervisors of soldier settlement.

The operations of the Department of Lands were not put on a 'business footing' until 1921, and the appointment of Thompson as Undersecretary in 1922 indicates a greater concern for business skills and a determination to impose control on state spending. This progression through the period had its eventual outcome in 1936 with Nash's decision to no longer accept the soldier settlers' special status. The needs of the individuals were being subsumed by the needs of the State, despite the passionate claims made on the soldiers' behalf by the Department of Lands, and supportive interest groups.

A crucial question for the later perception of the scheme relates to why the Government did not carry out a scheme such as the commonly reported successful scheme of the first Labour Government after World War II? The short answer is that the State was not in a position to do this in 1915, whereas by 1941 the centralised apparatus of government and the provision of services by the State had created an acceptable environment for the imposition of policies that curtailed individual freedoms in the land market. Other factors were also different. In 1918 the country was demanding the quick settlement of the soldiers on the land and was applying strong pressure. This need for speed was generated by a sense of fear, both of the disruptive potential of the soldiers and the possible political influences with which they may have returned. The soldiers may have felt that they had been abandoned by the State which had sent them to war, thus to reduce the threat they might pose to the ruling order the soldiers were to be quickly given a share of the State which would render them more conservative than radical. The

Canadian authorities, it has been suggested, were also working to quickly demilitarise their soldiers and return them to civilian life so as to protect the State.⁴¹ The soldiers did not have the benefit of substantial full-employment policies as did the soldiers after World War II, and so they had to be given the chance of quick economic independence. In 1919 the Government did offer work in special job-creation schemes, such as the public works and railways, but these were stop-gap measures. Pensions and gratuity payments were not sufficient to sustain a soldier and his family for any length of time and, without the safety net of the welfare state, speed in acquiring economic independence became essential. The Reform Government could not have advanced a policy such as that of the Labour Government, which anticipated that it would take ten years to settle those soldiers who wished to go on the land. It took successive governments after World War II some fifteen years to settle the same number of soldiers as did Reform in the space of two years.⁴² This speed was a direct result of the demands of the community. The tone of the statements by Boyack and Locke when they refer to 'rehab' or 'rehabilitation' in the context of the World War I, conjures up images of the World War II scheme, with its central control, restricted access, and financial accountability wrapped up in the embrace of the welfare state. This was not the case in 1918.

Although no direct comparisons are made in the historiography between the World War I scheme and that of World War II, the message is implicit in many of the later works. This is not a direct criticism for, as J.M. Bourne has noted, 'it is virtually impossible to view the First World War other than through the experience of the second'.⁴³ Bourne suggests that World War II, the 'people's war', born as it was on the simple Churchillian concepts of right and wrong, would end with the 'people's peace'. A similar notion is also apparent in New Zealand, with Labour fighting a war to protect the welfare state. The rewards that followed the war in

⁴¹ Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, pp.14-15.

⁴² Approximately 1000 soldiers had been settled on rural lands up to the armistice and another 9500 were settled by mid-1921.

⁴³ J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War 1914-1918*, London, 1989, p.227.

terms of high returns for commodities, on which was based a rising standard of living, and the solidifying of the welfare state, appeared to justify claims of the inadequacies and inequalities that followed World War I. The circumstances were, however, completely different following the development in the interwar period of the notion of central control and State efficiency on the Keynesian model. In the period 1945-49 the world economy was very different. The Labour Government had also been implementing internal policies to stabilise the economy in anticipation of a post-war depression that did not subsequently occur. There was scarcity in New Zealand's major market, the United Kingdom, much to the surprise of economists. The economists of an earlier period were predicting scarcity in production after World War I, but instead it was a time of surplus agricultural commodities.⁴⁴ Yet, it is implied in New Zealand historiography that the country was caught by surprise by the 1921 depression and that this reflected the incompetence of the Reform Government.

Where did the image of abject failure come from - was it the victory of emotion over rational intellectual understanding? What of the soldiers? One soldier settler interviewed by Boyack and Tolerton claimed: 'The rehab put us back on our feet' - he was not believed. The dominating image portrayed in the literature is that of the press that supported the Liberal and Labour Parties, and the views of the proponents of State financial efficiency such as the Keynesian economists. This thesis suggests that the soldiers' view of their situation, as publicised widely in the press during the period immediately after the 1921 depression, has remained the dominating image over time. The image of the 'walk off' had its foundations in this period. The hopes of the soldiers and the proponents of the scheme were unfulfilled, despite the failure rate being relatively low. Although they remained on their properties, it was not on the terms that they had anticipated. Experiences during the 1930s depression reinforced the image.

⁴⁴ Johnson, *Land Fit for Heroes*, p.505.

Psychologically the act of 'walking off' represents a peculiarly individualistic action on the part of the soldier and has come to embody both an image of failure and a sense of moral assertiveness, rather than being seen as the actions of 'inexperienced' irresponsible individuals thumbing their noses at the Government. To 'walk off' suggests that the soldier had realised the insurmountable odds working against his best interests - something the Reform Government and its officials could not recognise - and had quit in the face of them rather than suffer on. Central to this was the belief that no-one would voluntarily relinquish their opportunity of gaining 'competency' as a farmer in New Zealand.⁴⁵ This had an impact on a society drenched in the stories of the superiority of the New Zealand fighting soldier at war. In terms of the belief that New Zealand was still a rural Arcadia, the revelation that the yeoman soldier settlers were having problems was a shock magnified beyond its real meaning. The ultimate reward, access to the land, was not, and could not, be to blame in the arcadian model, nor were the soldiers looked to for lack of forbearance in the face of the economic odds. That some had left was sufficient cause to believe that they had been failed by the agency that had sent them to war and to which the community and the soldiers had turned for a 'just and generous proof of gratitude', the Government.

A reflection of just how far particular New Zealand expectations in the interwar period had changed from the arcadian and independent yeoman basis of original soldier settlement is the following remit passed in 1936 by the Kaikohe and District Ex-Servicemens' Association and transmitted to the Government:

Farmer tenants and mortgagors to be placed so that they can meet their obligations in full; **have a standard of living comparable with that of city workers**; and have their equities restored so that they may hope for complete financial independence within a reasonable number of years.⁴⁶ [emphasis added]

⁴⁵ This represents the psychological mind set associated with attaining the means for an economically independent rural existence.

⁴⁶ Letter from the Secretary of the Kaikohe and District Ex-Servicemens' Association, to the Minister of Lands, 10 January 1936, L&S file 26/274/50, NA.

CHAPTER 16

CONCLUSION

The failure of the scheme was not, as others have suggested, that the soldiers walked off, although numbers did in the first instance - but rather that the majority stayed under living conditions that were far worse than they had been led to expect and which could only partially be explained in terms of the exigencies of the world market for rural commodities. These difficulties were a constant reminder to the country of the soldiers' service, sacrifice and loss and, as Burdon has noted, this developed into a sense of guilt and pity which progressively increased as the economic situation declined, and as the soldiers grew older and progressively more infirm with the passage of years.

Reinforcing the soldiers' view of their betrayal was a general unease in New Zealand society. Guilt is a difficult emotion to quantify, but a large number of New Zealanders had reason to feel less than satisfied with their behaviour regarding the settlement of soldiers, a guilt heightened by the sense of patriotism which had presaged much of the discussion. The farming community stood out as a major culprit. The Farmers' Union supported conscription, yet it was farming organisations which lobbied for exemption of rural labour. Farmers were materially advanced by the war. They reaped the profits of the land boom and sales for soldier settlement which was seen as the harbinger of the soldiers' problems. It was established farmers who formed cartels at stock sales to force up the cost of already scarce animals to soldier settlers. There were, however, conflicting images of the soldiers' inclusion into the farming community. The constant requests for 'practical' farmers to be included in the scheme to both purchase land for settlements and to assist the new men suggests something beyond the contribution of mere experience. There appears to have been an expectation that farmers were somehow imbued with a morality that would let them overcome

their own self-interest. It was easy to blame the activities of land agents during the boom, but the agents existed to exploit a market which was shaped by the behaviour of the participants, namely the farming and landowning community.

In the wider context, ANZAC Day annually reminded New Zealanders of the sacrifice made by the soldiers, while the RSA was always vocal in pushing the interests of the soldier settlers. Rather than slip into the ranks of the farming community, the soldier settlers remained a group with a special identity, for whom the vagaries of life in the 1920s and 1930s were seen as a particularly vicious slap in the face because of their service. Society realised that the soldiers were especially deserving, but it had been unable, somehow, to deliver the brave new world, or even the old pre-war world, and had created what was, to contemporary eyes, essentially a group to be pitied. The 'walk-off' image, based on the perceived incompetence of the Massey Government, became a coping mechanism both for the soldiers who, despite being soldiers with all the imagery this involved, could not succeed as farmers, and for those in the community who were aware of their personal involvement.

This thesis set out to test the orthodox image of the World War I soldier land settlement scheme as it has been transmitted through the printed literature. It suggests that although the information on which the orthodoxy is based is largely correct, the inflection and judgemental tone that has been generally used is misleading. This derives mostly from the role the soldier settlement scheme has played in the political and ideological arena of damning the Massey Government as an aberration in the progress of the welfare state from the Liberal period through to Labour. The problems described in the received wisdom are for the most part accurate in the material sense, but the soldiers stayed on the land in large enough numbers for the scheme to be reinterpreted as a failure, not on the basis of the men walking off their properties, but on the notion of unfulfilled expectations. Failure in this context alludes to the inability of the parties involved in the scheme to make it meet their original expectations. There is no doubt that, in terms of concrete assistance within the parameters of available resources, particularly financial

resources during the interwar period of economic uncertainty and political prudence, soldiers were treated generously, fairly, and leniently. This, however, was not the issue at stake. The soldiers' perceived experience was one of betrayal, but it was the betrayal of an ideal, of hopes, and expectations. This experience was not just about a few thousand New Zealand soldiers in a land settlement scheme. It was a world-wide interwar experience for the veterans of 'the lost generation'.

APPENDIX 1

LAND SETTLEMENT FOR MAORI SOLDIERS

New Zealand historians have suggested that Maori soldiers received no repatriation assistance after World War I. Claudia Orange stated that on a visit to North Auckland to open a new house at Te Tii marae in Waitangi in March 1922, Massey promised 'to grant any measure that would put the Maori people "on a footing of equality" with Pakeha, a promise made too late in the day for many Maori: the government had not included Maori returned servicemen in rehabilitation schemes after World War One'.¹ Paul Baker has observed: 'For most of the war the Maori were non-combatants, in their own battalion, and upon their return they were neither fêted nor financially assisted as Pakeha soldiers were'.² Elsie Locke incorrectly describes the work of the 'rehabilitation board' in providing all the various types of assistance to returned soldiers and she notes: 'there was really no room for Maori in these schemes'.³ Michael King places the failure of the Government to repatriate Maori soldiers in the context of the war aim

¹ Claudia Orange, *The Treaty of Waitangi*, Wellington, 1987, p.231: She cites as evidence the *New Zealand Herald*, 30 March 1922, p.6; and Kay Boese, *Tides of History*, Whangarei, 1977, pp 128-131. The reference to Boese covers the theme that Massey was not welcomed on to the marae and that plans for a large gathering were over-optimistic. No mention is made of the disquiet over soldiers. The newspaper reference refers to a lengthy report on Massey's visit to the north, accompanied by Apirana Ngata, Sir James Carroll and other Members of Parliament. It is reported that he met leading figures from the 'native community'. Issues reportedly discussed included making funds available for the development of Maori farming on their own lands and a proposal that unproductive Maori land should not be subject to local body rates. The *Herald* stated that 'Massey declared that he had the greatest sympathy with the ideal of the Maori occupying their own lands. Under the Soldiers Settlement Act Maori soldiers were treated exactly the same as European soldiers and from his own observations he could say that many were going to be successful'.

² Baker, *King and Country Call*, p.221.

³ Elsie Locke, *Two Peoples, One Land: A History of Aotearoa/New Zealand*, Wellington, 1988, 2nd Edition, 1990, pp. 64-65.

of Maori leaders, which was to be seen as equals to the Pakeha.⁴ He suggests that the Maori performance in war had the effect looked for by Maori leaders and that,

it became more difficult for pakeha leaders to discriminate against Maoris. But the hopes of returning Battalion members that conditions of war-time equality with Pakeha soldiers would continue were not fulfilled. There was not even rehabilitation assistance for Maori servicemen'.⁵

Graham Butterworth discusses the impact of war service on Maori soldiers and observes:

they were more self-confident and perhaps more socially and economically aggressive than their elders. They wanted to enjoy the same opportunities and have the same standard of living as the pakeha. The failure of the Government to make adequate provision for them in the repatriation schemes had infuriated but not completely disheartened them.⁶

He speaks of expectations that Maori conditions would improve 'but in fact Maoris did not even obtain rehabilitation assistance'.⁷ He appears to be expressing two view-points in this article, and it is his 1969 MA thesis which provides a clue to his sources, as he does not footnote these claims in the article.⁸ He quotes Sir Apirana Ngata, from a question put to the Minister of Lands in Parliament in 1919:

under the present system of examination by Land Boards Maori applicants, whether returned soldiers or not, are placed at the bottom

⁴ Michael King, 'Between Two Worlds', *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, W.H. Oliver with B.R. Williams, (eds.), Wellington, 1981, p.297.

⁵ *ibid.* King provides no reference for this claim and when asked by this writer about his sources, stated 'that this was something that was always known'.

⁶ Graham Butterworth, 'A Rural Maori Renaissance? Maori Society and Politics 1920 to 1951', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 81(2), 1972, pp.165-166.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Graham Butterworth, 'The Politics of Adaptation: The Career of Sir Apirana Ngata, 1874-1928', MA thesis in History, Victoria University, Wellington, 1969.

of the list, and there is certainly a prejudice against Maori applicants for Crown lands.⁹

Butterworth did not include the first part of Ngata's question to the Minister of Lands in the House in 1919, which was a request by Ngata for land to be set aside for Maori soldiers and special assistance provided beyond that already covered by statute.¹⁰ Butterworth also cites Sir Eruera Tirikatene in the 1946 supply debate, when the Member for Southern Maori stated:

The fact was that from previous Governments Maori returned servicemen got not an inch of land, or a house or tools of trade.... There were no rehabilitation facilities for Maoris after World War I. He was speaking as a Maori returned soldier from that war, and he knew what he was talking about.¹¹

These views must now be questioned. The evidence suggests that assistance was available but the opportunity was taken up by a smaller proportion of Maori soldiers than for Pakeha soldiers.

Approximately 2227 Maori soldiers served in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, firstly as members of the Native contingent in the Mediterranean theatre, and then in the Pioneer Battalion, which was organised in the New Zealand Army Engineering Corps upon arrival in France in 1916. Maori troops serving in the Pioneer Battalion at the armistice officially returned to New Zealand on the *Westmoreland* in 1919 and were one of only two units to return as 'formed bodies'¹² The Government's policy for Maori members of the expeditionary force was the same as for Pakeha, and they were officially included in any schemes that were developed for the repatriation of New Zealand forces. *The Solders' Guide*, a publication available to troops overseas from 1917, stated:

⁹ NZPD, 22 October 1919, p.685.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Butterworth, 'The Politics of Adaptation', p.171; NZPD, 17 September 1946, p.22.

¹² Pugsley, *On The Fringe Of Hell*, p.289.

applications from Maori soldiers of the New Zealand expeditionary force come before the same boards and committees as those from pakeha soldiers and will be treated in exactly the same way.... Their interests are safeguarded by the appointment to the board or committee of a Maori member (in most cases a returned soldier).¹³

It was also the Government's intention that after the war the discharged Maori soldiers would receive the same opportunities for land settlement as Pakeha. Of the approximately 1800 Maori soldiers who returned from overseas service,¹⁴ thirty have been traced as acquiring farms under the various settlement schemes.¹⁵ Archival records reveal that twenty soldiers with Maori names received assistance to settle Crown Land.¹⁶ There may have been many more Maori soldiers assisted who had European names.

Why apparently was so little achieved for the repatriation of Maori soldiers, despite the stated intention of the Government? It is not claimed that the following explanation is the full story of Maori soldier settlement and until a Maori historical framework is developed for the study of such questions, the full story will remain untold. It is, however, within the scope of my major study to review the provision of land for Maori soldiers.

¹³ *Soldiers' Guide*, Wellington, 1917, p.37.

¹⁴ James Cowan, *The Maoris in the Great War*, Auckland, 1926, p.8.

Total of all ranks who served----- 2227

Total deaths on active service----- 336

Total wounded on active service----- 734

¹⁵ It is unlikely that many more will be found, although it would take a systematic search of the minute books of the Auckland Land Board to confirm this.

¹⁶ Of the primary sources used to trace Maori soldier settlers the most useful was the register of Crown leases of soldier farms held at National Archives. This contains the names of some 4100 returned soldiers who acquired leasehold Crown and Land for Settlements land. By checking all the names in the register twenty soldiers with Maori names were identified, however, this method may have missed a number of Maori soldiers with European names. There appears no viable way of matching the nominal rolls of Maori soldiers with the Soldiers' Register to identify Maori soldiers with European names who acquired Crown Land.

A Return prepared in September 1920 for Tau Henare, Member for Northern Maori, showed that 11 Maori soldiers in the North Auckland Land District had applied for land under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act, and that six had been successful in acquiring farms.¹⁷ The Minute Books of the Wellington Land District reveal the names of two Maori soldiers who obtained mortgage finance under section 2 of the 1917 Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act to purchase private freehold land near Waikanae.¹⁸ This is significant as the section 2 transactions were on the outer limits of perceived state paternalism towards the returned soldiers, and the Government had the least supervisory control over these farms. Of the approximately ten per cent of soldier settlers' files surviving in the archives, only one Maori file is extant. This was for two brothers, Te Ao and Tame Ruki, who took up land in the Pirongia survey district on the 27 January 1919. They had abandoned the property by 1923.¹⁹ The names of two Maori soldiers, W.P. and W. Barlow, also appeared for a settlement in the Moerangi block near Kawhia.²⁰ A Maori soldier named Teme Tukaki was one of a group of eight soldiers who had a property, subsequently called Pakarau settlement, purchased on their collective behalf by the Crown under section 3 of the 1917 Amendment Act.²¹ Most of the Maori soldiers who were successful in obtaining Crown leases did so in 1919 or 1920, which matches the experience of Pakeha soldier settlers as 9,000 of the total 10,500 soldier settlers were settled after the armistice.

Concern for the inclusion of Maori soldiers in the land settlement scheme was expressed almost as soon as the Native Contingent left for overseas service. In March 1916 the Gisborne office of the Department of Internal Affairs recommended that Maori soldiers' claims for land be considered equally with

¹⁷ Return to an order of the House of Representatives on a motion of Tau Henare, Member for Northern Maori, 20 September 1920, Legislative Series 1/1920/174, NA.

¹⁸ Wellington Land Board minutes, p.188, L&S-W 12/18, NA.

¹⁹ Te Ao Ruki and Tame Ruki, L&S file 26/17049, NA.

²⁰ L&S file 21/239, NA.

²¹ Return to an Order of the House of Representatives, 14 October, 1921, *AJHR*, C.9b, 1921, p.3.

Pakeha soldiers and, it was noted, 500 soldiers had gone to the front from the Gisborne district.²² In response, the Cabinet decided on 28 March 1916 that Maori soldiers were to be placed in the same position as Europeans.²³ The policy that was developed from this action was for 'Native' land to be purchased for the settlement of the Maori soldiers, so that they would be assured of land in their own districts.²⁴ Early statistics reveal that of the 60 applications for land in the Auckland land district up to March 1916, two were from Maori soldiers.²⁵

The Army, aware that Maori soldiers might return to New Zealand with different life expectations, established classes at the New Zealand Army Engineers Reserve depot at Christchurch, England, for members of the Pioneer Battalion. The General Officer in Command of the New Zealand Army in the United Kingdom, Brigadier-General Richardson, reported in 1918: 'classes have been established in English and arithmetic for the Maoris under a Maori instructor.... A special agricultural class for Maoris has also been inaugurated under L/cpl Hinaki'.²⁶

One implication of the historiography on the issue of Maori soldiers is that those who returned on board the *Westmoreland* were not made aware of the repatriation facilities available to them. Of the 20 Maori soldiers traced from the Soldiers' Register into the Defence Department records, 40 per cent returned to New Zealand on the *Westmoreland* in 1919. It appears that some 900-1,000 Maori troops returned on this ship.²⁷ In a letter to Massey on 26 April 1919, Sir James Allen, Minister of Defence and Acting Prime Minister, observed that:

²² Memo from the Department of Internal Affairs, Gisborne, to Massey, 11 March 1916, L&S file 26/1/3, NA.

²³ Memo from Massey to Brodrick, 29 March 1916, L&S file 26/1/3, NA.

²⁴ *ibid.* Brodrick informed Massey that there was no need to make special consideration for Maori soldiers as they were already covered by the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act.

²⁵ L&S file 26/2, NA.

²⁶ Report of the Educational Work of the NZEF for September 1918, War Archives file 1/3/4, NA.

²⁷ The Pioneer Battalion left the United Kingdom on 28 February 1919. The *Westmoreland* had a complement of 50 officers, 3 women, and 978 other ranks, *Evening Post*, 6 March 1919, p.7.

The pioneers, consisting of the Maoris, returned to Auckland on 5 April and I met them on arrival. There was a fine gathering at the Domain and that evening I embarked for Gisborne and East Coast districts. There was also a very fine gathering of natives from all over the East Coast even better arranged than at Auckland.²⁸

Although Allen appeared to make no specific reference to soldier farms, that he attended the welcomes paints a different picture than that of the orthodoxy, which emphasises neglect. By 1919 the Army was operating a system of education and briefings on board the troopships, where information supposedly useful for the soldiers to evaluate their future prospects was available. When the troopships arrived in New Zealand, officers of the Discharged Soldiers' Information Department, later called the Repatriation Department, went on board and personally spoke to all troops, asking if they required specific help, and handing out free rail passes. This final procedure may not have been followed in the specific case of the *Westmoreland*, but the 50 per cent of other Maori soldiers who returned on different ships appear to have received the standard information.

Despite this probability, at least one Maori Officer felt sufficiently aggrieved to write to the *Dominion* in April 1919, prior to the return of the *Westmoreland*, claiming special recognition for the Maori members of the Pioneer Battalion. The writer, Lieutenant Arthur Gannon, was commander of the 13th reinforcement to the Maori contingent and he had also served as a trooper with the Fourth Rough Riders in the South African War. He was scathing of the treatment dispensed to returned soldiers in general, and defended the 'boys from the front' against what he saw as unjust accusations of faults, but he was primarily concerned for the Maori soldier and he claimed: 'conventionally, I admit the Maori is treated as other men are; actually he is at a manifest disadvantage. He is furnished with his sheaf of papers and the Department has done with him'.²⁹ Gannon suggested that a special

²⁸ Allen to Massey, 26 April 1919, Allen Papers 9, miscellaneous Correspondence, NA. Captain Henry Vercoe, who subsequently featured in the settlement story, returned to New Zealand in August 1918 with the D.S.O. and four years service. He was employed by the army to arrange the welcome of the Pioneers. The Countess Liverpool, wife of the Governor-General, attended the Rotorua welcome for the soldiers, *Evening Post*, 8 April 1919, p.9.

²⁹ *Dominion*, 28 April 1919, p.8.

department be established in Wellington for dealing with all matters relating to the Maori soldier.³⁰ In later years a Maori soldier recalled that although the Maori soldiers may have been entitled to the same assistance as the Pakeha, they were not informed because 'the pakeha did not come to tell us'.³¹

Despite the concerns of Gannon, early evidence suggests that Maori soldiers in North Auckland were applying for land by mid-1918. This provoked outrage in the local farming community, which enlisted the aid of the local Member to ensure that the national endowment land in question was retained for the settlement of 'European' soldiers.³² In September 1919 Sir Maui Pomare was approached by Rotorua people with a request for land to settle three discharged Maori soldiers. The request, in letter form, reflected the gulf between the two races' attitudes towards land when it was stated:

it is not no doubt like a gift of land in the days of our forefathers when a gift was a gift, once given it was for all time there was nothing further said about it. But gifts we receive from the European are such that they carry many conditions and restrictions'.³³

The Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Amendment Act 1917, contained provisions for soldiers to obtain mortgage finance to pay off existing mortgage commitments, to buy freehold or leasehold land, or obtain farm development finance. In 1919 the Minister of Lands had outlined the policy for Maori soldier landowners to obtain assistance under section 2 to develop their land, which had to be free of legal restriction.³⁴ However, the Department of Lands was concerned about the restrictions placed on the use of Maori land as security for mortgages in section 230 of the Native lands Act 1909. The Department eventually decided that it had

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ Locke, *The Kauri and the Willow*, p.156.

³² Letter from Newell Irving to V.H. Reed, Liberal Member for the Bay of Islands, 5 October 1918, L&S files 26/2/9 and 26/1-5, NA.

³³ Letter from Tamihana Tiketere to Sir Maui Pomare, 29 September 1919, L&S file 26/1/3, NA.

³⁴ Letter from the Minister of Lands to Topi Patuki, Member for Southern Maori, May 1919, L&S file 13/25-10, NA.

the power to alienate Native land to recover its interests, if the soldier was unable to meet mortgage commitments.³⁵

In terms of practical application of policy for the benefit of Maori soldiers, one Crown settlement was specifically set apart for settlement by them. The Otamarakau settlement was established at Matata in the Bay of Plenty on the Hoskins' estate, which had been purchased in 1919 for soldier settlement under the Land for Settlements Act. Original plans developed by the Department of Lands called for the division of the estate into six properties for the settlement by soldiers. In late 1919 Captain H. Vercoe of Arawa, who was then the Maori translator for the Legislative Council, made application to the Minister of Lands on behalf of a number of returned Maori soldiers for the block because it was, according to Vercoe, 'particularly suited to Maori settlement' and 'the soldiers concerned wished to take it up as their parents and relatives lived in the same district'.³⁶ The Minister was sympathetic, but the proposal was opposed by H.M. Skeet, the Commissioner of Crown Lands for the Auckland district. Skeet suggested that if the Minister insisted on pursuing this plan then the property should be further subdivided from the intended 6 sections to 12 sections, as 'general experience in this district is that the natives manage small areas better'. By October 1919 Guthrie had firmed his resolve to settle Maori soldiers on the estate and Captain Vercoe offered his thanks, noting that Maori from his part of the country deeply appreciated the Minister's actions. He also requested that the section size remain at 100 acres, but Skeet remained adamant that smaller was better, although he noted that if Captain Vercoe wished to personally take up a section he might receive special consideration.³⁷

³⁵ Department of Lands and Survey General Circular 16, 21 February 1922, L&S-HK 5/1, NA.

³⁶ Memo from Guthrie to Brodrick, 12 September 1919, L&S file 21/153, NA. The following sequence is based primarily on L&S file 21/153.

³⁷ In November 1919 Skeet wrote to the Undersecretary expressing satisfaction in the Minister's approval for a subdivision of the sections. He stated that at Rotorua a deputation of natives led by Captain Vercoe had met him and agreed that the smaller sections would be better for them. The original property was divided into six 100 acre sections, then twelve 50 acre sections, while Skeet even suggested a further subdivision into twenty-four 25 acre sections.

News of the Minister's plans for the block filtered out to the Pakeha community, and the Tauranga RSA expressed the greatest dissatisfaction and indignation, claiming that the property was surrounded by thousands of acres of unimproved native land. The perception of the Maori as land-rich was an obvious factor in these views. The Pongakawa Farmers' Union approached Massey directly with their objections. Guthrie defended his plan to Massey, claiming that

from my experience as Minister of Lands it has become quite obvious to me that the conditions of settlement along with the pakeha are not generally acceptable to the natives, which is borne out by the fact that very few of them have been settled under our scheme. As the Maoris fought side by side with pakeha and are deserving of the same consideration in the matter of land settlement, I have come to the conclusion that special blocks should be offered to them in approved localities where the conditions can be made acceptable.... I may say that on representation made to me by Dr Pomare it is also my intention to set aside for the same purpose a portion of the Wanganui trust lands.

Guthrie came under increasing pressure from two local Members of Parliament, F.F. Hockley, and the Native Minister, W.H. Herries, to change his decision, while letter-writing campaigns from various interest groups continued unabated. In February 1920 Guthrie inspected the property and received the views of deputations for and against the proposal. For the local Maori, Vercoe complained that the initiative was needed because Maori soldiers were outnumbered in ballots, and that to his knowledge only half a dozen Maori had received farms. Hockley, on the other hand, claimed that existing Maori land was a blight on the growth of the district and that the high state of development of the Hoskins' property would not be maintained by Maori lessees. Guthrie relented and decided to divide the settlement between the two races. He defended this decision by claiming that Maori success was more assured when settled amongst Pakeha and that the Maori soldiers were picked men, chosen because they had a good future. The Minister also claimed that he had made a promise to Captain Vercoe and that it was a matter of honour that he should keep his promise.

In reply to the Minister's decision, the local Farmers' Union claimed that the Minister had not said, 'Maori one side pakeha the other'. [This is in reference to the East Coast railway line that passed through the property]. What Guthrie had done was to give the Maori soldiers access to the smaller, but more developed sections which contained the existing buildings. Local Pakeha sensitivities were again ruffled with questions being asked about Vercoe's status, and why Guthrie should place so much emphasis on his promise. The Farmers' Union asked 'who was going to supervise the lucky natives'?

The ballot for the four Maori sections was held in August 1920 and only two applications were received, from the brothers Augustus and Winiata Rogers.³⁸ Brodrick believed that this apparent lack of interest was because the sections were too small. He was aware, however, that Captain Vercoe was going to make application for the two homestead sections as one unit. Vercoe did so, and was successful with his application, but the settlement records indicate that he was a better advocate than practical farmer. In a 1923 report Augustus and Winiata Rogers were described as good practical farmers and were given permission to take over Vercoe's sections after the latter had reportedly abandoned the property.

Captain Vercoe was also instrumental in placing claims before the Minister from Whakatane Maori for the settlement of their returned soldiers. A group representing Ngati Awa, Ngati Pukeko, and Putawai met Guthrie in February 1920 and put a case for the provision of land for their returned men, as they possessed no surplus land. They asked that the Government provide the necessary land in their district so that picked men could be settled separately from European soldiers.³⁹ A subsequent appeal to Massey by local Maori at Whakatane in March 1922 observed that Maori soldiers in other districts had been settled on the land, but not in the Whakatane district. On behalf of local people, Mr George Powell

³⁸ The Army files of the two brothers indicate that prior to the war they had resided in Auckland and worked for the Auckland Tram Company. It can be speculated that their status as picked men related to their hapu wishing to entice back to their home area.

³⁹ Report of a Native Deputation to the Minister of Lands at Whakatane, 20 February 1920, L&S file 26/1/3, NA.

requested Crown Land in the area so that the Maori soldiers could be near family.⁴⁰

A briefing paper by Skeet that emerged from this meeting stated that the Maori soldiers were requesting more land than they required, especially in view of their continued land sales to Europeans, and that they could provide land for their men themselves. As a result of this, and in terms at odds with his expressed earlier concern, but in line with a perception of the Maori controlling large land resources, Guthrie informed the local Member that the Maori could provide land themselves without calling upon the Government.⁴¹ This statement, which on the surface appears a deflection of the Government's responsibility towards the returned Maori soldiers, had in part been proposed by Ngata and Pomare in mid-1916.

Ngata and Pomare had begun formulating a proposal for Maori soldier settlement in early 1916, and this was presented to the House during the debate of the tabling of the 1916 Annual Report of the Native Department.⁴² Ngata claimed the initiative was necessary, despite Maori soldiers having equal access to land under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act, because 'owing to the ignorance that prevails in the Maori districts as regards the procedure in regard to land ballot, in practice Maori soldiers will not be able to take advantage of the provision which is made for all soldiers'.⁴³ He proposed that rather than expect the Crown to set apart scarce land especially for Maori soldiers, the Maori people would be asked to sell land to the Crown which would subsequently be set aside for the settlement of Maori soldiers. These settlements would be subject to the same restrictions as to previous experience, and financial and practical assistance, as land for Pakeha soldiers under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act.

⁴⁰ *ibid.* This suggests that they were aware of the settlement possibilities under the Act but objected to the fact that the Crown assistance necessitated moving out of their local district.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *NZPD*, 13 July 1916, pp.70-89.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.70.

The Ohaoko gift block in the central North Island was a Maori initiative which emerged on the lines envisaged by Ngata in 1916, and legalised by the 1917 Native Land Amendment, Act which made it possible for Maori landowners to give land to the Crown for Maori soldier settlements.⁴⁴ Graham Butterworth claims that the Government was not prepared to do anything substantial to assist Maori and that 'the government remained indifferent to general Maori needs, despite the generous action of Te Heuheu's gift of 35,000 acres of land for Maori soldier settlements in that year'.⁴⁵ In his 1969 thesis, Butterworth suggests that the gift block was 'for general soldier settlement'.⁴⁶

The complete gift block was made up of three sections, the largest of which was 25,301 acres.⁴⁷ The ceremonial gifting of this parcel of land was carried out on 2 October 1916 at the Waihi marae, Tokaannu, by Te Heuheu Tokino and the Tuwharetoa people, before Dr Maui Pomare. The land was not sold to the Crown, but was to be an absolute gift to returned Maori soldiers, irrespective of tribal affiliation. Pomare telegraphed Sir Francis Bell, the Acting Prime Minister, with the news of 'the great self-sacrifice made by one of Maori tribes'. He suggested that Bell would appreciate both the spirit which prompted the making of the gift and its national character.⁴⁸ The balance of 20,000 acres of the gift block was to be provided by the Ngatiama and the Ngatiwhiti from the Ohaupo block and Pomare attended a meeting of eighty of these people at Taihape on 7 October

⁴⁴ Ngata informed the House in July 1916 that early in the war the people of the Urewera district had gifted 2,000 acres of land to the Crown for the war effort. It appears that administrative and legal difficulties involved in gifting land prompted the passing of the 1917 Native Land Amendment Act.

⁴⁵ Graham Butterworth, *Aotearoa 1769-1988: Towards a Tribal Perspective*, Wellington 1988, p.33.

⁴⁶ Butterworth, 'The Politics of Adaptation', p.170. His source as footnoted in the thesis is J.A. Grace's Tuwharetoa tribal history. Grace believed that the gift took place in 1919. The *Taihape Daily Times*, 10 October 1916, reported that 'three blocks of land in the Kaimanawa block, which adjoins the Ohaoko block, forty thousand acres of which is going to be devoted to returned Maori soldiers, are to be presented to the Government to be surveyed into farms for white soldiers', clipping on L&S file 26/1/12, NA.

⁴⁷ It was proclaimed in the *New Zealand Gazette* on three occasions, 22 November 1917, 10 January 1918, and 14 March 1918.

⁴⁸ Telegram from Pomare to Sir Francis Bell, 3 October 1916, L&S file 26/1/12, NA.

1916.⁴⁹ One Tioti Pohe gave 2,000 acres outright, although the question of the further 20,000 acres was delayed until absentee owners could voice an opinion. A proposal to gift 100,000 acres in the Kaimanawa range for settlement by Pakeha soldiers was also delayed. However, the record shows that only a further 10,000 acres was eventually contributed in February 1918.⁵⁰

The motivation for the gift is interesting, and allowing that a nineteenth-century dispute over Ohaoko may have still been simmering (it was located on the watershed of the Kaimanawas) the Tuwharetoa may have resorted to the precedent of the gift of the Tongariro National Park as a means of safeguarding interests and gaining mana. Pomare's position at this stage, in terms of mana, was not good, as Ngata had criticised him for not volunteering as medical officer for the Maori contingent, and the Tainui and Taranaki people in his electorate were not volunteering for military service. In this light, his enthusiasm for the gift block is more explicable. Concern was also being felt that, apart from several of the 'loyal' tribes, Maori recruits were not coming forward in sufficient number to adequately reinforce the 'Native Contingent' in France.⁵¹

Although the intricacies of tribal history may be difficult to understand at this distance, some obvious questions can be asked: Would Maori soldiers have taken sections on the block, and did the Tuwharetoa expect the offer to be taken up? In light of the strength of Maori spiritual and emotional belief in relation to their *turangawaewae*, it would appear unlikely that Maori soldiers from other areas would take up sections unless they were from landless iwi, or were sufficiently imbued with the Pakeha sense of economic individualism to feel confident working on their own away from family connections. It has been noted that the returning Maori soldiers were exceptional in terms of the length of time many had spent

⁴⁹ *Evening Post*, 11 October 1916, p.6; *Taihape Daily Times*, 9 October 1916, clipping on L&S file 26/1/12, NA.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ See P.S. O'Connor, 'The Recruitment of Maori Soldiers, 1914-1918', *Political Science*, 19(2), 1967, pp.48-83.

living in the European environment, hence they may have felt personally more independent. However, the comments of Vercoe and Powell raise the issue as to whether hapu would allow their young men to move away. At least some Maori soldiers were aware of the gift block because on 23 November 1916 seven Maori soldiers from the Wellington and Otaki area, and one from Motueka, wrote to the Department of Lands requesting sections on the block. They expressed a wish to view the land as quickly as possible.⁵²

Whether Maori soldiers could have taken up land on the gift block was, in practice, never an issue, because as early as February 1917 the Department of Lands was aware that the gift was more of a symbolic gesture than a practical one.⁵³ A report from the local Crown Lands Ranger described the country as being unsuitable for settlement by discharged soldiers. The Ranger's report noted that the terrain was rough, rugged country, 5000 feet in elevation, which was covered in snow for some months of the year and, being part of the Kaimanawa mountain range, the vegetation was tussock, mountain scrub and birch.⁵⁴ In July 1918 the Wellington Commissioner of Crown Lands reported to the Undersecretary that 'it seems this patriotic gift of 35,000 acres which looks so well on paper is practically useless for the settlement of discharged soldiers'. He suggested that the Crown take over the block or sell it outright and devote the funds to the acquisition of more suitable land.⁵⁵ The details of the gifting of the block were subsequently used by the Department to show that something was being done for Maori soldiers and, in spite of the knowledge that the block was useless for farming, Guthrie informed Brodrick to keep possession of the block for future subdivision 'when demand from returned Maori soldiers warrants it'.⁵⁶ The issue of the disposal of

⁵² L&S file 26/1/12, NA.

⁵³ Memo from Brodrick to Sir Francis Bell, 14 February 1917, L&S file 26/1/12, NA.

⁵⁴ Report from H. Lundius, Crown Lands Ranger, to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Wellington, 15 May 1918, L&S file 26/1/12, NA.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Minute from Guthrie to Brodrick, 12 July 1918, L&S file 26/1/12, NA.

the block has lingered until recently. As a postscript to the story of the gift block the following letter was written to Prime Minister Gordon Coates in 1925:

Being a returned soldier and also a member of the Ngati Tu Wharetoa tribe, having interests in the Ohaoko block I wish to know as to what the government intends to do about the block as we were given to understand that Ohaoko block was presented to the government by Tu Wharetoa tribe to be divided amongst the soldiers of Tu Wharetoa but all we know is that the late Te Heuheu Tokino had a lot to do with it. The first and the last time we ever heard anything about it was when we came back. From then till now there is nothing more been said about it.

Coates replied in terms of the earlier negative land-use reports, but said that if an area could be identified which could be profitably worked the writer was to contact the Commissioner of Lands in Wellington.

In common with the community at large, Maori entered enthusiastically into fund-raising to provide assistance and comforts for the soldiers while they were serving overseas, and on their return home. The Maori Soldiers' Fund was a Maori initiative that took on a regional bias. In 1917 Ngata suggested the establishment of a fund at the hui for the dedication of the Waimotatini meeting house.⁵⁷ The background to this proposal can be found in Maori concern that because of the isolation of the outlying districts, particularly the East Coast, some of their returned soldiers would not have equal access to the benefits of the general patriotic funds.⁵⁸ The fund was established under the War Funds Act 1915, and the first meeting of the executive committee was held at Parliament on 28 March 1917.⁵⁹

Prominent East Coast Maori, including Ngata and Lady Carroll, were appointed trustees with power to farm lands and enter into mortgages, which was authorised

⁵⁷ *Te Ao Hou*, 6, 1954, p.58. See also the Report of the Commission into Native Affairs, *AJHR*, G.11, 1934, pp.117-127.

⁵⁸ *NZPD*, 13 July 1916, p.71.

⁵⁹ Maori Soldiers' Fund minute book, NA.

under section 13 of the Native Land Amendment Act 1916.⁶⁰ Later, as funds were raised in a wider area, the membership of the Board was extended to include representatives from Wairarapa, Hawkes Bay, and Rotorua.⁶¹ Captain William Pitt was appointed secretary.⁶² Under the aegis of the Maori Soldiers' Fund Council over £50,000 was raised by public subscription and loans. The amount actually collected has been estimated at between £38,000 and £42,000. The rules of the Council had as some of its objectives; the relief, assistance and support of Maori members of the New Zealand expeditionary forces and their dependents; the appointment of local committees in different parts of the Dominion; the carrying out of all things necessary or expedient to bring about a national scheme for the administration of funds collected on behalf of any of the objects of the society.⁶³

The funds raised were used to acquire the leasehold of several properties, beginning with grazing rights to 2000 acres of Hoata station near Tikitiki in 1917, followed in 1919 by the purchase, for £10,580, of five native leases at Hicks Bay totalling 5,121 acres, and the Crown lease to Hereheretau near Wairoa in 1921. The latter was made up of several blocks which the Crown acquired between 1918 and 1921 specifically for Maori soldier settlement and was on a 33 year lease with right of renewal.⁶⁴ Employment and training in agriculture were to be given to returned Maori soldiers, and the profits from these venture were to be directed to the rehabilitation of all Maori soldiers.

⁶⁰ Ngata appears to have been lobbying in 1916 for the power to invest the funds in farming ventures, so as to provide a continuous income for the returned soldiers which would supplement the Crown's pension provisions.

⁶¹ Report of the Commission into Native Affairs, *AJHR*, G.11, 1934, pp. 118-119.

⁶² Pitt had been one of the officers returned to New Zealand under a cloud after the August 1915 actions on Gallipoli. This action by General Godley had upset Ngata and the Maori in New Zealand who were actively supporting the war effort. O'Connor has suggested that Pitt was also involved in some inappropriate dealings with regimental funds, which did not augur well for his subsequent control of the Soldiers' Fund, O'Connor, 'The Recruitment of Maori Soldiers, 1914-18', p.59. The Commission into Native Affairs appeared to view the activities of Pitt in the administration of the fund with some suspicion. Pitt was subsequently successful in a ballot for a soldier settlement farm, despite his pre-war occupation of clerk, Pitt's personal file, Base records, Ministry of Defence.

⁶³ Internal Affairs file 30/5/59, NA.

⁶⁴ *NZPD*, 9 September 1919, p.345; Annual Report of the Department of Lands and Survey, *AJHR*, C1, 1921, p.17; Report on the Maori Soldiers' fund, 20 July 1925, Treasury file 40/580, NA.

The Hoata venture was abandoned in February 1921 because of financial problems,⁶⁵ while the funds put into developing the other two properties were rendered valueless by the effects of the 1921 depression, and inefficient farming.⁶⁶ In 1925 a Commission of Enquiry recommended that the Fund be placed in the control of the Native Trustee, to whom the remaining assets of the Fund were mortgaged.⁶⁷ The lease on Hereheretau was rearranged by negotiation with the Crown to reduce rental costs on a large area of unproductive country, while development on both stations was continued. The five Maori lease-holders of the Hoia land refused to reduce the annual amount payable, despite the Trustee's intention to operate the property to recover the funds for the benefit of the soldiers.⁶⁸ By 1929 Hereheretau was showing a small profit, although Hoia had been severely affected by bush fires, with the loss of sheep and improvements.⁶⁹ Up until May 1935 the stations had accumulated operating losses of £35,000, while a further £55,000 was owed to the Native Trustee. The original Fund's equity had disappeared.⁷⁰ According to a 1954 Treasury report, the Native Trustee had sold the Fund's interest in Hoia, while Hereheretau had become profitable with the post-war wool boom.⁷¹ The Fund was reported as standing at £88,000, of which

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, Treasury file 40/580, NA. In 1954 it was stated in *Te Ao Hou* that Hoata was abandoned in 1925 while the 1934 Commission noted that the station was actually owned by a syndicate fronting for Ngata, who was described in evidence to the Commission as the real purchaser.

⁶⁶ Memo from the Secretary of the Treasury to the Minister of Finance, 7 July 1933, Treasury file 40/580, NA: Memo from W. Downie Stewart, Minister of Internal Affairs, to the Secretary, National War Funds Council, 9 March 1923, Internal Affairs file 30/55/59, NA. Stewart described the losses on Hoia station as being 'due to general trading as graziers and stock raisers, due to the heavy fall in the prices of cattle and sheep, loss of stock from causes not yet explained by the trustees, and a laxity in the management of the station'. The Native Commission claimed the losses had nothing to do with the slump in prices because most of the money was lost in the period of high prices during 1917-20.

⁶⁷ The properties were reported to be in a very poor state, with the grass having badly deteriorated, while the fencing was in need of complete renewal because inferior materials had been used. 1932 report of the East Coast Soldiers' Fund, Treasury file 40/580, NA.

⁶⁸ Report of the Commission into Native Affairs, *AJHR*, G.11, 1934, pp. 122-123.

⁶⁹ The National War Funds Council, Report of the Executive, 11 July 1929, p.3, Internal Affairs file 30/3/20, NA.

⁷⁰ Report from the Secretary of The Treasury, to the Acting Minister of Finance, 13 April 1937, Treasury file 40/580, NA.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

£34,000 was in cash and the balance in the leasehold property, which was free of mortgages. The Fund showed an annual income in 1954 of £8,000 per annum.⁷²

It is difficult to tease from the evidence the degree to which returned Maori soldiers benefited from the Fund. In 1932 the Prime Minister, G.W. Forbes, reported that of the £58,000 expenditure of the Fund up to 1925 only £500 had been for the relief of Maori soldiers.⁷³ In 1954 Treasury noted that the Trustee had begun to distribute funds and that any indigent Maori veteran of World War I was eligible, and 'it is not restricted to East Coast Maori.... Up to the moment applications are well within income. Grants up to £50 appear to be the rule to assist needy cases or pay funeral or other expenses'.⁷⁴ *Te Ao Hou* observed in 1954 that 'sixty-three applications were received... and forty-seven were granted.... As a general rule these grants are confined to a maximum of £50, and not made to help with housing, farming and the establishment of businesses, but purely to alleviate stress'.⁷⁵ Some East Coast Maori may have benefited from training and employment on the properties at various times, but the impression is left that the soldiers had been denied the true benefits of the money raised, because of poor initial investment in, and administration of, the stations, and the apparent less-than-honest use of the fund by the trustees. Had the fund been disbursed to all returning Maori soldiers, each would have received approximately £30.

The story of the Soldiers' Fund has some significant implications for the whole issue of Maori soldier repatriation. The Fund, at its broadest, encompassed Arawa, East Coast, and Kahungunu areas, although there were illusions to the fact that the Fund was for the benefit of all Maori soldiers. By the mid-1920s it was being described as the East Coast Soldiers' Fund, and most subsequent official

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ *ibid.* The amount of £500 had been sent to the United Kingdom for the benefit of the Maori soldiers prior to discharge. The 1934 Commission found that all but £500 of the fund had been lost, W. Downie Stewart, 'The Native Affairs Investigation', *The Round Table*, 98, March 1935, p.446.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Te Ao Hau*, 6, 1954, p.56.

correspondence, including the Commission on Native Affairs in 1934, describes it thus.⁷⁶ In 1954 Treasury was quite explicit that the benefits of the fund were not restricted to East Coast Maori. This suggests that the benefits of the fund may have been converted to the use of Ngati Porou and those iwi supportive of Ngata. Downie Stewart implies that favouritism was a component in Ngata's administrative lapses which led to the Royal Commission and, ultimately, his resignation as Minister of Native Affairs.⁷⁷ Ngata's actions are also significant in later interpretations of the Maori settlement scheme by Butterworth, who appears to have accepted Ngata's probable view that the inclusion of Maori soldiers in the general scheme was a danger to traditional power structures and mana.⁷⁸ The actions of the Government in including Maori soldiers in the general scheme smacked of a continuation of the assimilationist policies pursued by Reform since coming to power in 1912. The Government's policy of providing repatriation assistance specifically for Maori soldiers was, in practice, piecemeal and aimed, it appears, at those tribes with influential spokesmen.

Regional variation is another theme that emerges. It was no coincidence that the tribal areas which provided the bulk of the troops received the majority of Government assistance, a result not unexpected considering the divisive nature of the volunteering/conscription debate and that assistance was intended for soldiers.⁷⁹ The exception are Ngai Tahu, and nothing appears to have been done in the South Island, which perhaps explains Eruera Tirikatene's observation in 1946. The absence of Ngati Porou soldiers in the list of individual settlers traced through the records of the Department of Lands may be explained by their land holdings and Ngata's efforts with the welfare fund farms. Arawa appear as a

⁷⁶ Section 23 of the 1925 Appropriation Act, which transferred the Fund to the Native Trustee, described the Fund as being 'commonly known as the Gisborne Maori Soldiers' Fund' which 'is vested in the Maori Soldiers' Fund Council Incorporated Trustees', Treasury file 40/580, NA. See also the Report of the Commission into Native Affairs, *AJHR*, 1934, G.11, pp.117-127.

⁷⁷ Downie Stewart, 'The Native Affairs Investigation' p.450.

⁷⁸ This is speculative but considering Ngata's attitudes towards the *Ratana* movement it is likely he would object to any initiative that endangered the power and mana of the leading families of Maoridom.

⁷⁹ O'Connor, 'The Recruitment of Maori Soldiers', and Baker, *King and Country Call*.

collectivity to be open to new options and perhaps Vercoe's individual powers of persuasion might also be considered a crucial ingredient.

In terms of the animating policies of assimilation, it was in the Government's best interests to include rather than exclude the returning Maori soldiers. These young men were more worldly and had explored the Pakeha world and, according to King and Butterworth, they wanted access to this world, but were denied it by the Government. The appeal of economic advantage, which was seen as being derived from an independent rural existence, animated some of the Maori soldiers to apply for land. It may be that because so little was actually achieved, the New Zealand historiography implies that nothing was attempted.

The obvious point at issue is whether the figure of thirty Maori soldiers receiving assistance on to farms is sufficient evidence to modify the orthodoxy. This represents a minimum of two per cent of the Maori soldiers who served, as compared with the Pakeha figures for land settlement of approximately ten per cent. In terms of the above claims for exclusion from the repatriation process, numbers are not relevant. These figures show clearly that there was an intent and will on the part of the Government to include Maori soldiers on the same terms as Pakeha soldiers. Whether this assistance was culturally appropriate was not a contemporary issue for Pakeha, although Ngata appears to have had a Maori agenda in the operation of the Maori Soldiers' Fund. Comments made at the Whakatane meeting in 1920 hint at something more specifically Maori being required for the soldiers. Of particular interest was a note attached to the above return on the number of soldier applying for land in the North Auckland Land District, which observed that the successful applicants were identified by their Maori names and that there was no way of identifying European-named Maori from the record.

The historical orthodoxy suggests that the lot of the Maori soldier was much better after the Second World War. As a postscript on the First World War scheme and with a sense of *déjà vu*, it is useful to compare the policy for Maori soldiers after

World War I with a statement of the Undersecretary of the Native Department in 1943:

I have discussed this matter with the Lands Department and we agree that any Maori will be eligible to apply for Crown Lands and provided he meets the full requirements demanded from the other applicants and can show that no Native Lands are available to him he will receive equal treatment to that given to the Pakeha soldier. As Crown Lands will be in limited supply it is however hoped that all Maoris requiring land will be rehabilitated on their own tribal lands.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Memo from the Undersecretary, Native Department, to the Director of Rehabilitation, 2 December 1943, L&S file 26/1/12, NA.

APPENDIX 2

LAND SETTLEMENT FOR ARMY NURSES

The passage of the original Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Bill through the House in 1915 gave Members the opportunity to wax lyrical on the future land settlement desires of members of the New Zealand Army Nursing Service.¹ The Member for Eden, C.J. Parr, speculated at the possibilities for the country if the nurses met and married the returning soldiers.² E. Newman, the Member for Rangitikei, was a little more 'modern' in his comments and thought that returning nurses should be provided with land on the same terms as soldiers, although it was the lighter type of farming he had in mind. He implied that the nurses had abandoned their previous occupations in a similar way to the soldiers, so were deserving of consideration. In response to an interjection that 'they will all get married', Newman responded:

They may all get married, but I do not know that they would all prefer marriage. I know of some women who manage their farms a great deal better than men do.... they are entitled to a piece of land if they want it for the kind of farming they would like to follow.³

Not until 1917 did a nurse test whether, after two years service overseas, she was entitled to assistance under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act.⁴ The entitlement of nurses to assistance hinged on their status within the Army. An enquiry from Brodrick to Hestor MacLean, Matron-in-Chief, revealed that nurses were enrolled for the length of the war and took the same oath of allegiance as soldiers.⁵ A subsequent legal opinion from the Solicitor General stated:

¹ *NZPD*, 24 September 1915.

² *ibid.*, p.218.

³ *ibid.*, p.214.

⁴ Memo from the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Auckland, to Brodrick, 20 September 1917, L&S file 13/25, NA.

⁵ Memo from Brodrick to MacLean, 25 September 1917, and MacLean's reply, 27 September 1917, L&S file 13/25, NA.

The (Discharged Soldiers' Settlement) Act has no application to nurses belonging to the New Zealand Army Nursing Service who have volunteered for service abroad in the present war. They are not Discharged Soldiers within the meaning of the Act. The term "discharged soldiers" is limited to former members of the New Zealand naval forces or expeditionary forces.⁶

The status of nurses in relation to the expeditionary force had previously been debated in the passing of the War Pension Act, 1915, and special provision had been made so that nurses could receive pensions.⁷ The official policy of the Department of Lands from 1917 to 1919 was that nurses were not eligible for land settlement assistance. Two nurses from Timaru were barred from making application because of the policy. However, lobbying by the RSA resulted in the 1919 Amendment Act including nurses under the legislation.⁸ The issue appears to have decided in favour of the nurses because their war service was recognised as a sacrifice.⁹

A positive development, in terms of gender, was the determination by the Crown Solicitor in 1921 that Miss Marion Higgens was eligible for assistance under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act. Higgens, originally from Gisborne, had volunteered for service with Ettie Rout's volunteer sisterhood, and had opened the first military school for cooking in Egypt, where she held the rank of Captain and

⁶ Letter from the Solicitor-General to Brodrick, 6 October 1917, L&S file 13/25, NA.

⁷ The pension was to apply only to soldiers who actually left New Zealand. Sir James Allen gave a hint of the reason why nurses were not considered in the same light as soldiers when he remarked on the Australian legislation. In the Australian and Imperial cases, soldiers had to be involved in 'warlike operations' and this was interpreted as coming to grips with the enemy; something nurses did not do. *NZPD*, July 1915, p.226.

⁸ The Gisborne RSA wrote to the Minister requesting that the privileges given to discharged soldiers be available to nurses, L&S file 13/25, NA. A special conference of the RSA passed a motion that the benefits under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act be extended to widowed mothers, and nurses of the expeditionary force, L&S file 26/1-6, NA.

⁹ Refer to Jan Rodger's PhD thesis in History, Massey University, forthcoming.

received a salary.¹⁰ Miss Higgens did in fact get an advance, but under which section of the Act is not known, as her personal file does not survive.

No comment is made in the New Zealand historiography about the exploits of nurse 'soldier settlers'. Marilyn Lake mentions that Australian nurses were included in Victoria's scheme, although she gives only one example and chose to highlight the sexist appraisals of the woman's efforts by male inspectors.¹¹ It has been claimed that women in Australia were excluded from agricultural training, and that those Australian nurses who received land after World War I received no state training.¹² Some New Zealand nurses had taken up the option of training at the State Farms on returning to New Zealand.¹³ Bertha Louise Forrester and Edith Marion O'Loughlen listed their previous experience on their applications for land under section 3 of the 1917 Act as 'five months at the government horticultural station, Tauranga'. O'Loughlen also noted that she had completed a course in poultry at the government experimental farm, Milton.¹⁴ Of the other nurse settlers no evidence was found that they had attended training courses, although the training provided was in the lighter areas of agriculture and not in dairy or pastoral farming.

It was not unusual for women to hold Crown leases in New Zealand although this was often 'dummyism' so that husbands could hold larger areas, or so that wives personal assets could be exploited while remaining relatively secure. Nor does it appear unusual for women to operate farms. Indeed it could be expected to be

¹⁰ Circular from Brodrick to all Commissioners, 15 July 1921, L&S file 26/274, NA. The ruling of the Crown Solicitor observed that 'the terms of the section are very wide. It does not require combatant service'; Letter from Ettie Rout to Sir James Allen, 28 March 1916, Army Department file 1/49/200, NA; Tolerton, *Ettie*, p.115, pp.120-121.

¹¹ Lake, *The Limits of Hope*, pp.40-41, 68.

¹² J.H. Bell and U.S. Pandey 'The Exclusion of Women from Australian Post-Secondary Agricultural Education and Training 1880-1969', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 36(2), 1990, pp.205-216.

¹³ See Chapter 3. It was reported that six nurses were receiving training in the apiary section, Report of the Board of Agriculture, *AJHR*, H.29, 1920, p.29.

¹⁴ Application Forms, L&S file 21/294, NA.

common practice as the nineteenth century practice of closer settlement was invariably underpinned by the notion that the male settler would work on public works to provide an income in the off-season while the farm was being brought into production. The position of the nurses appears somewhat different in that they were personally farming their properties and, in the case of three of them, the farms appeared to provide their sole source of income. Amelia Bagley seemed to be an exception.¹⁵ Seven nurses have been traced from the Soldiers' Register as receiving leases to Crown lands while two others received advances under section 2 for the purchase of a business premises.

The first nurse to obtain a property was E.J. Shaw, who successfully balloted for a section on the Cloverlea settlement on the outskirts of Palmerston North on 31 October 1919. The section was just over four acres in size.¹⁶ One year later the Wellington Land Board accepted the surrender of the section.¹⁷ Margaret Nixon obtained a Crown lease of 68 acres in the Christchurch Woodlands settlement on 21 March 1920 and forfeited the property 11 May 1922.¹⁸ The remaining nurses appear as longer-term tenants on their properties and the following pen portraits provide a sketch of their farming operations.

The above-mentioned O'Loughlen and Forrester obtained two adjoining sections on the Omehu settlement in the Bay of Plenty, close to the Edgecumbe railway station. Their applications had been with the Commissioner for six months before they were approved for the sections in March 1922. The Omehu block was purchased under section 3 of the 1917 Amendment Act which meant that the two nurses made application for the purchase of the property in partnership with the other specific male applicants. This suggests that their gender might not have been

¹⁵ Marie Burgess, 'Amelia Bagley', in Charlotte Macdonald Merimeri Pinfold, and Bridget Williams, (eds.), *The Book of New Zealand Women*, Wellington, 1991, p.34, Bagley's entry makes no reference to the fact that she held the lease of a soldier farm after the war.

¹⁶ L&S file 21/183, NA.

¹⁷ Wellington Land Board minutes, 26 October 1921, L&S-W 12/22, NA.

¹⁸ *New Zealand Gazette*, 1922, p.1298.

seen as an impediment by the other soldier settlers. The property was then subdivided after purchase between the group, thus explaining the nurses' ability to get neighbouring sections. They possessed a total of £950 starting capital and received a single £750 government advance.¹⁹ They farmed the two sections as a single dairy farm with a total of 45 acres and are remembered in the district as doing all the work themselves, except some of the heavy work such as hay-making. The Omehu settlement suffered severely from flooding during the early years and, in 1925, the settlers asked for a special exemption from rent to recoup some of their losses. The nurses' property was reported to be undamaged as they were on the higher ground. The file shows the nurses still in possession of the property in 1931, and they paid rates on the sections in the 1933-34 year, but sometime during the late 'thirties they sold out, moved to Otaki and took up horticulture.²⁰

Two nurses appear to have obtained sections in settlements where brothers or close relatives also held sections. This may have improved their chances of satisfying the Land Board of their likelihood of making a success of the ventures. Bessie Keyte took up the 66-acre section 14 on the Te Miro settlement near Cambridge on 29 July, 1920.²¹ An F. Keyte held section 17. No record remains of her fate. Amelia Bagley, Deputy Matron of the Army Nursing Service, took a renewable lease on 534 acres of second-class bush land in the Retaruke district on 30 June 1921.²² This land was in the same region as the Mangapurua, or 'Bridge to Nowhere', settlement. By 1926 she had 194 acres of the bush cleared and grassed, with a capital value 5/- per acre.²³ It appears she surrendered or transferred her interest in the section in 1932, although her brother owned a nearby section. Prior to the war, Bagley was a leader in the establishment of rural nursing services, particularly for the Maori community, and she continued to carry out this work

¹⁹ L&S file 21/294, NA.

²⁰ I am indebted to Mr Wallie Gibbons for providing some detailed local information on these two nurses.

²¹ 'Soldiers' Register', NA.

²² 'Soldiers' Register', NA.

²³ L&S file 21/296, NA.

until her retirement in 1931.²⁴ That Bagley continued her health administration career suggests that the section may have been an investment for her retirement, or that an intention to take up full-time farming after the war may have been thwarted by the financial uncertainty of the time.

Edith McLeod took over a special tenures lease of two sections on the Hukutaia settlement at Opotiki on 13 August 1925 with capital of £1100. The sections had been abandoned by the previous soldier lessee. She held 105 acres of first-class dairying land with the necessary buildings already erected.²⁵ She reportedly possessed good farming and financial skills, and a special revaluation report by the Commissioner of Crown lands in 1934 indicated that her farm had a carrying capacity of between 53 and 60 cows with a butterfat production of 12,000 pounds. It was reported that she maintained her financial commitments to the Department during the depression at the expense of improvements such as ploughing, topdressing and fencing, although her cow shed had been condemned. She was shown as having an unencumbered herd and no private mortgages. The Commissioner observed that 'Miss McLeod is trying to do all the work herself but it has proved too much for her and in future it will be necessary to employ labour'.²⁶ A subsequent application for postponement of rent necessitated a field inspector's report, which stated that Miss McLeod was a capable and dependable farmer but that 'the farm is too large for a woman to handle and there is no doubt she is killing herself trying to do so'.²⁷

Without a detailed study little more can be added to the nurse settlers' story. However, the evidence suggests that the issue of gender in agriculture and land settlement requires further examination. While New Zealand legislated in 1919 to include nurses in the benefits of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act, Canada

²⁴ Burgess, 'Amelia Bagley', p.34.

²⁵ Soldiers' Register, NA.

²⁶ L&S file 21/133, NA.

²⁷ *ibid.*

was less forthcoming and a 1920 amendment to its soldier settlement legislation specifically debarred nurses.²⁸

²⁸ Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, p.145.

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PRIMARY

NOTE ON SOURCES

The most important primary source for this thesis was found in the Lands and Survey Department series 1, subseries 26 files held at National Archives, Wellington. These files are in two accessions. One, originating from the Department of Lands and Survey in the early 1960s, contains approximately 1,600 files, the majority of which are personal settler files; the second is a more recent arrival from Land Corporation, a successor agency to the former Department of Lands and Survey. This second accession of some 800 files contains the previously unused major subseries 26/1 (administration and policy) files which provide the bulk of the administration references for this thesis. The two surviving collections of subseries 26 personal files are almost exclusively those of Crown tenants who were settled under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act, 1915, and under section 3 of the 1917 Amendment Act. It appears that these files (some 2,300 in all) represent mortgages owed to the Department of Lands and Survey in 1937 when they were transferred to the State Advances Corporation. This would explain the absence of any files related to section 2 purchases, current account advances, or urban property acquisitions. The 500 personal files in the more recent Land Corp accession represent Crown leases still extant in the 1960s and 1970s.

Lands and Survey series 1, subseries 13 (financial administration) files also came from Land Corp. Details of individual estates purchased under the Land For Settlements Act which were opened for soldier settlement are found in the Lands and Survey series 1, subseries 21 files. Aspects of the scheme were covered in a random way in the large collection of series 1, subseries 22 files. The minute books of the Wellington Land Board, numbered L&S-W 12/16-25 as Waste Land Board minutes, are a useful resource and may provide the basis for a subsequent quantitative study of section 2 applications and approvals. Land Board minutes for Taranaki, Nelson, and Westland are also held at National Archives. The Land Board minutes for the North Auckland and Auckland Land districts are held at the Auckland office of National Archives.

Series 1/subseries 26/274/50 are two volumes detailing the issue of cream cheque orders. 26/274/64 are four volumes related to the operations of the Dominion Revaluation Board. Information on soldiers and soldier settlement also emerged from a number of other departmental files.

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