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A LAND FIT FOR HEROES?

The Otago experience of the National Soldier Settlement Scheme after World War One

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A Long Essay submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours in History, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

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This study of soldier settlement in Otago was undertaken in order to test how accurately the Government had assessed the reasons for the failure of the scheme. The Otago experience could then be compared with that of the National Scheme. Also, by looking closely at two soldier settlements, the specific problems could be examined.

Although background information was available, the soldiers left no records, and their progress could only be followed through the newspapers. This gave a different slant to the official reports. Information on the soldiers' finances was also scarce although it was clear that most were in difficulty.

I would like to acknowledge the help of a number of people in writing this work including the staff of the Hocken Library, my supervisor Dr. Brooking and my parents.
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

- Preface
- Abbreviations
- Introduction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter One</th>
<th>The Origins of the Scheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>How the Scheme Worked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>The Role of Public Opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four</td>
<td>The Clifton Settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five</td>
<td>The Benmore Settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six</td>
<td>The 1921-22 Depression and the Inquiry Boards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Conclusion

- Bibliography
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.J.H.R.</td>
<td>Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.P.</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.Z.F.U.</td>
<td>New Zealand Farmers' Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.Z.P.D.</td>
<td>New Zealand Parliamentary Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.S.A.</td>
<td>Returned Soldiers' Association</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

"Many people think that the soldiers Land Settlement Scheme has been a complete failure. That is not the case... As a matter of fact, a little over 50% have been successful".

[Edward F. Massey, *N.Z.P.D.*, 201 (8 August 1923), 627]

In 1915 the Government introduced a scheme for settling returned soldiers on the land. It was not a success. Although Prime Minister William Massey found a fifty percent failure rate acceptable, it was both unnecessary, and a shattering experience for the soldiers concerned.

The origins of the scheme and the inadequate machinery that administered it help to explain its failure. An examination of public opinion is also important. It reveals many problems that the Government denied for years. Alternative schemes, which would have prevented such key problems of inflated land values, corruption and indebtedness were ignored. Two of the soldier settlements will be looked at closely. In this way, much can be learned of the soldiers themselves, the specific problems they faced and what the land Board, the R.S.A. and the Government did to help them. Also, at both Clifton and Benmore, a great deal of local interest was aroused.
The problems of the soldiers appeared to mean much to people and also served as a focal point on which to base general resentments.

Finally, the effects of the 1921-22 Depression on the soldiers will be examined, and the inquiry into the scheme which eventually led to the revaluation of soldiers' land.
ORIGINS OF THE SOLDIER SETTLEMENT SCHEME

Chapter One

The origins of the scheme for settling soldiers on the land are important because the general lack of coherent planning and failure to think about likely problems to some extent determined the failure of the scheme. Also, the establishment of the scheme reveals much about the attitudes of the Reform Party in relation to Land Settlement and soldier rehabilitation.

On going Land Settlement reflected the values of Massey and the Coalition Government. The 1915 Act was passed quickly and easily, only months after the main body of men had left New Zealand. Yet a comprehensive rehabilitation scheme for soldiers appeared only towards the end of 1919 in response to a great deal of public pressure. Land settlement, therefore, was of much greater significance to the Government than just as a way of rewarding the soldiers and repatriating them. It was the means by which the Government intended to build their utopia; a land fit for heroes. This idealization of the land and the farmer was of greater importance in the introduction of the scheme than economic motives. Soldier settlement was also connected with the stirrings of New Zealand's uncertain nationalism. The Coalition Government wanted the soldiers to be happy to come back to New Zealand.
One means of ensuring that happiness was to outdo other countries in terms of assisting returned men onto the land. The settlement scheme was introduced because politicians wanted it and not, as was later claimed, because of strong pressure from the public. Indeed, there was little public interest in the early stages and later, the public did not favour the Government's ideas.

There were a number of precedents for settling soldiers on the land. The practice goes back a long way in one form or another. The Romans settled warriors all over their empire and the British did so too; first in Ireland, and then in South Africa, Australia and Canada during the nineteenth century. In New Zealand, there was a soldier settlement in Sir George Grey's time when soldiers were brought from India. One politician, who was an early supporter of the scheme, mentioned that his father had been given land in Auckland for military service, some sixty years ago. After the Maori Wars, soldiers were encouraged to settle and double as protectors of the civilian population. The scheme was not successful. Most of the soldiers sold out their holdings for mere pittances. There was further settlement


after the Boer War and again, few of the soldiers remained on the land.

Unfortunately, the previous difficulties failed to provoke any serious discussion in Parliament. Massey mentioned in 1919 that "there have been soldier settlements in New Zealand before but they have not been satisfactory, generally speaking". Massey was not at all worried by this fact. He had supreme confidence in his ability to produce a workable scheme. But despite these precedents, New Zealand had little real experience in large-scale repatriation and the Government did not look seriously at what material was available on the subject. Only the 1915 clause prohibiting re-sale for ten years was based on past experience.

The idea of soldier settlement appealed to the Government because it suited their ideal of rural life, not because it had worked in the past. Precedent was presumably where the Government got the basic idea from but it had a special appeal to the Reform Party. This is illustrated by the combination of idealism and patriotism that was very common during the "debate" on the scheme.

3. N.Z.P.D., 185 (13 October 1919), 302
Some of the politicians were influenced by the glorious past in a quite unrealistic manner. Mr C.J. Parr, the M.P. for Eden, said that:

"one can picture in the future all over the country colonies of these returned soldiers placed as the ancient Romans did, in different parts of their great Empire after their victims... and if these returned soldiers of ours should have the good fortune to meet and mate with returned nurses". 

These politicians were hopelessly out of touch with the realities of war and rehabilitation. They idealized land settlement, hoping that it would "convert the drift to the cities and turn it backwards to the natural home and field of man - the country".

Concern about the soldiers' votes played some part in the origins of the scheme. The Government realised that if they did not look after them, the soldiers would express their discontent through the ballot box.

Land settlement was also seen as a reward for the young man who had sacrificed their health and happiness and everything else. That reward was to take the form of being independent of any particular master.

4. N.Z.P.E., 174 924 (September 1915), 218
5. N.Z.P.E., 174 (24 September 1915), 218
6. ibid., 215
7. ibid., 215
This ideal was extended only to land settlement. Some critics asked about those going into business. There was no thought of helping them to achieve independence. 8. This suggests again that land settlement was viewed as special.

It was feared too that the soldiers would not want to come back to New Zealand. It was felt that the very best of youth had gone away and it was important that they should be happy to return. 9.

The main objections to the scheme in parliament were that the finances suggested were not adequate. Speakers in the parliamentary debate certainly did not sound as if they were pushed into the scheme, as they later claimed. On the contrary, land settlement was apparently something close to their hearts and their political interests. There was a dangerous lack of discussion in Parliament. Politicians did not look at what went wrong in the past and there was an absence of details about how the scheme would actually run, and its possible consequences.

The origins of the settlement scheme largely related to the needs and aims of Massey and the Reform Party.

8. ibid., 215
The period 1912-21 was the golden age of New Zealand farming. Farmers were the most important single, occupational grouping within New Zealand politics. Many leading politicians were themselves farmers and the Reform Party generally enacted legislation in response to the opinion of the broader farming community. The 1913 land Act, for example, provided that revenues from the sale of land in special districts should be applied to building roads and bridges. In 1891, Auckland had overhauled Otago in the number of farm holdings; - 8608 to 8487. The Reform Party emerged as the champions of these small farmers. In 1911, Massey adopted in full the Farmers' Union freehold policy. He stood on a platform of anti-socialism and Ward's inability to carry his party one way or another on the land question played into Massey's hands. The Reform Manifesto in 1914 promised a continuation of closer settlement via the mechanism of a graduated land tax.


11. ibid., p. V


Reform's land policy was summed up in 1922 as letting men with little capital get on to leasehold lands with the option of freehold, using the money from rents to acquire further land for settlement. Aggregation would also be prevented.

Reform, therefore, was a farmers' party and although the New Zealand Farmers' Union was neither very important or effective until 1929, farmers had so much political influence that they had little need of a pressure group.

When introducing the Bill, Prime Minister Massey said he was certain that when the war came to an end, a very large number of the soldiers would desire to go onto the land. It is not surprising that Massey took this view when his personal background is taken into account. He was born in Northern Ireland, of Scots/Irish parentage, the son of a tenant farmer.


17. N.Z.P.D., 174 (24 September 1915, 211

Massey's attitude to land was clearly influenced by his early years. His father was attracted to Auckland by the offer of free land but he became disillusioned with "liberal" land policies. This was communicated to his son. Massey's slogan in the great freehold campaign was a very Irish-sounding one; "Every man his own Landlord". 19. Massey's political support was based among North Island small farmers and he supported land settlement, therefore, for personal and political reasons.

It was not only the Reform politicians who supported land settlement. J.T. Paul, a trade unionist, also had had personal experience of tenant farming. His father had been a hard-working man who had taken his family onto the land and become a slave to the man who really owned the farm on which he tried to scratch a living. Like many others, he had lost his farm. 20.


20. N.Z.F.D., 185 (13 October 1919), 455
Land settlement, therefore, suited the political basis of the Reform Party and the personal ideals of many politicians. Economic motives were not important. They were not mentioned at all in Parliament. The attitude to settlement of farms was quite different to the general rehabilitation programme for soldiers.

Repatriation began with the establishment of an Information Department but its scope was very limited. The Government did nothing more, despite a public outcry. Twenty thousand men had returned by May of 1918 and it was impossible for a glorified employment bureau to deal with all the aspects of repatriation. 21.

One minister expressed the belief that Sir James Allen had a scheme up his sleeve, but, as Mayhew points out:

"While recognising Sir James's sympathy for the returned soldiers and his great industry, the R.S.A. might well be excused from feeling that a scheme of repatriation should have by then been withdrawn from the obscurity of someone's sleeve." 22.


22. ibid., p.52
The Repatriation Act was eventually passed in December, 1919, and it established a Repatriation Board, which was linked to Local Boards and committees such as the N.Z.R.S.A., the Employer's Association and Labour Department Offices. The Boards did a good job once they got going and no doubt benefitted because time was taken over preliminary and little understood work. 23.

The Government did not rush in as they did with the Land Settlement Scheme. The whole issue was seen in a much more realistic light, in contrast to the idealistic and half-developed ideas surrounding the origins of Land Settlement. Furthermore, the Government enlisted the help of the whole community as it failed to do with Land Settlement.

Public opinion did not play an important role in the origins of the scheme. But there was some concern voiced that the soldiers would not be happy to return to New Zealand. Some people felt that the schemes in New Zealand were crude in comparison with the work being done elsewhere.

23. ibid., pp. 52-55.
One writer to the paper feared that soldiers had had their eyes opened overseas and would not be content with the recollection of rough stones and shanties that were huddled together to form the majority of New Zealand townships. Nor would they be contented to settle down in a shack in the middle of a fifty acre paddock. 24. The public wanted the soldiers to have no regrets about returning home. The same lack of confidence in New Zealand that the Government felt was shared by some members of the public. But the Government's later claim that there had been tremendous public pressure on them to introduce the scheme was quite untrue. They said that the ships came back with the soldiers demanding a settlement scheme. 25. In fact the Government initiated the scheme without any real pressure on them from the public.

The soldiers have not left any records of what they wanted. It was certainly believed at the time that many of them would be keen to go on to the land.

24. The Press, 6 September 1917, Copy sent to J.T. Paul.

25. N.Z.P.D., 201 (8 August 1923), 662
The Government thought that Land Settlement would appeal both to the country boys and also to soldiers who had formerly worked in towns but did not want to return indoors after experiencing the open-air life. Although this reveals more about the attitude of the Government than the soldiers, it was probably not far wrong. A lot of men did go to the war to get away from their jobs. They were seeking excitement and would have found it difficult to return to a factory or office after years of living in the open. The scheme provided a tremendous opportunity for many soldiers, and had it been successful, the idea would have been a good one. The fact that many soldiers did apply for land and that the scheme was re-introduced after the Second World War, despite the problems, suggests it was something that had wide appeal.

The scheme to settle soldiers on the land largely originated in the philosophy and political needs of Massey and the Reform Party. They developed a scheme which they believed, quite rightly, would appeal to both the soldiers and their strongest supporters, the farmers.

Unfortunately, the Massey Government viewed both war and Land Settlement in idealized and glorified terms. They were quite out of touch with reality. Therefore, potential problems were not examined in order to develop adequate safe-guards. Nor was enough thought put into the machinery that would administer the scheme.
The legislation concerning soldier settlement developed in two separate, but overlapping areas. It provided land to settle soldiers and as well, finance for the returned soldiers to purchase their own farms and improve the land. This chapter will look at the machinery which dealt with the buying and selling of land; the Land Purchase Board and the District Land Boards.

The 1915 Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act provided two schemes to enable settlement on land administered by the Land Boards. Under Section three, Land under the 1908 Land for Settlement Act could be proclaimed for selection by soldiers only. Under Section four, settlement was possible on crown or settlement lands under special conditions. The same privileges for the remission and postponement of rent applied and financial assistance was also available.  

Land could be taken up under ordinary tenure with the right of purchase or renewable lease or under special conditions:

first, the land could be purchased by a deferred payment of up to twenty years with 5% deposit and 5% interest; or second a renewable lease with purchasing clause.

Residence was compulsory and the Land Board determined the improvements required and the rent. 2.

The 1915 Act provided £50,000 for advances at an interest rate of not more than 5%. Many discharged soldiers did not have sufficient capital to effect the necessary improvements on their land, and this money enabled the Land Board to assist an applicant in the clearing, fencing, and general improvements of the land, erection of buildings and purchase of implements, stock and seed. The Board made recommendations to the Minister of Lands who determined the rate of interest. Interest could be dispensed with in cases of hardship. The Land Board, with the consent of the Minister, could also remit rent. Any loan could be to the extent of 75 percent of the value of the work done but not exceeding £500 (or £1000 for bush lands).

An amendment in 1916 allowed a relative to apply on behalf of a soldier overseas, and the amount for advances was increased to £100,000. A further £20,000 was authorized for roading lands set aside for soldiers. This was of some benefit because the Department was able to purchase stock and material at cheaper rates than the settlers. The limit for advances made to settlers remained at £500. This was felt to be sufficient for many allotments. It was not enough for the large pastoral runs but it was the task of the Land Board to ensure that men were only allotted land where they had enough experience and capital to manage.

Section Two of the 1917 Amendment Act provided finance for soldiers who could not find crown or settlement land they liked, or who were unsuccessful at a ballot. Having obtained an option over a property, a soldier could apply for an advance of up to £2500 to purchase the land. The Land Board considered the matter and made a recommendation to the Minister.

5. ibid.
The 1918 Finance Act carried the sum of advances to £1,500,000 but this was still inadequate. The Minister of Finance had to call upon reserve funds. The Discharged Soldiers Settlement Loans Act of 1919 authorized £12,500,000 for advances to soldiers, as well as additional money for the acquisition of land. It was thought that these funds would be ample until Parliament met again. But the funds were exhausted by January of 1920 because of large numbers of applicants and the high prices for houses and land. Advances for £885,000 were authorized in April of 1920 and then the Government gave notice that operations would have to be curtailed until Parliament could arrange more funds. The Minister of Finance was empowered to borrow £6,000,000 for soldier settlement in 1920 and a further £1,000,000 was made available from a consolidated fund.


7. ibid.,

There was never great concern in Parliament at these very high costs. Indeed, free spending was urged. One member of Parliament said he did not care about the cost of the scheme, even if it were £200,000,000. If they could place soldiers on the land from which they would make a living, what did the cost matter? It was argued that a happy, contented and prosperous population was the greatest wealth a nation could have. 9.

The Government's enthusiasm for land settlement was reflected in their extensive advertising campaign. Various particulars about land allotment and how to apply were published in the press and a special pamphlet was distributed to all interested associations. 10.

Information about lands open for settlement and monthly sales posters were supplied to all societies and individuals who desired to be placed on the mailing list. The Soldiers' Guide, given to all soldiers when they returned to New Zealand, supplied all possible information as to what had been done to help them onto the land. 11.

9. N.Z.P.D., 178 (13 July 1917), 384

10. N.Z.P.D., 178 (13 July 1917), 530

Finally, a booklet was widely distributed to the troops in London. It was issued especially for those wishing to settle on the land. Although it did advise soldiers to beware of inflated land values and warned about land that frequently changed hands and was heavily mortgaged, the booklet was extremely encouraging. A soldier needed only a little capital and some experience to work a small holding successfully. The key to success, it was claimed, lay in energy and perseverance. The New Zealand Government was giving every possible assistance to encourage young settlers. Success or failure depended entirely on the settlers' own efforts. 12.

Despite their keeness to attract soldier settlers however, the Government realized that the timing of the Settlement programme was important. Delays might be necessary because they had to provide for large numbers of soldiers who would return at the end of the War. It was felt that most of the land should be kept back for the Main Body. Then all soldiers would be given an equal chance and thereby preventing discrimination against those who were serving longer periods. 13.

But the Government came under some pressure from returned soldiers who complained when recently surveyed lands were not opened up for settlement. It was protested that New Zealand had settled only five hundred in 1917, compared with twelve thousand men in Australia. It was quite a difficult problem for the Government. While recognizing that they needed to provide for the majority of soldiers, the Government did not know when the war was going to end. They could not have lands lying idle for very long because they deteriorated and there was a drop in productivity. While they wanted to settle the soldiers as they returned, it seemed unfair that those arriving back first should be at an advantage. This indecision about the timing and size of purchases probably accounts for some of the mistakes made by the Land Purchase Board.

There was also disagreement over what type of land was best suited to the needs of the soldiers. The basic argument was over whether bush land or improved farms were the better idea.

14. *N.Z.P.D.*, 181 (10 April 1917), 50
The majority of early soldier settlers were placed on improved land that was bought by the Government. Most of these men were in a poor state of health and working in bush country was beyond them. When the Main Body returned, many of them also wanted improved farms and the Crown therefore acquired a large number of small, improved properties. There was much criticism of this policy however. Protests were made against paying such high costs for men who were just starting out. One politician claimed that they might as well have been buried at Gallipoli. He suggested that instead, they should work the bush together as happened when he was a boy. But many people were not happy with the idea of placing soldiers in the back-blocks. Loneliness was a major factor against these isolated areas and another point against bush settlement was the financial strain on men of limited capital. Settlement on improved land was felt to be fairer to them. One politician argued that they should be placed under conditions that were as pleasant as possible.

15. *N.Z.P.D.*, 181 (10 April 1917), 50

16. *N.Z.P.D.*, 181 (10 April 1917), 50

17. *N.Z.P.D.*, 176 (29 June 1916), 297
Some people then argued that it was preferable to place the soldiers on improved land so they could obtain some returns immediately. Others argued that unimproved lands should be allotted so they might reap the fullest benefit. The Government decided to try and please everyone. The 1917 report of the soldier settlements said that: "Seeing what diversity of opinion there is on the subject, both by farmers, theorists, business people and societies of soldiers themselves, the Government deemed it best to provide land suitable for the requirements of all soldiers". 18 All options were available. Although this appeared to be a satisfactory solution, it merely avoided the issue. The problems related to the settlement of bush land and improved farms were not examined. Consequently, none of the necessary safeguards were developed.

The one plan most European New Zealanders agreed upon was using Maori Land for soldier settlement. The Government viewed the purchasing of Maori Lands at cheap rates as a safety value for the whole operation. 19 It was justified because if Maoris were not cultivating their land in suitable fashion and using it productively, there was no reason why the Government should permit the land to remain idle and not be a source of income for the Dominion. 20

19. N.Z.P.D.*, 184 (3 September 1919), 142
20. ibid.*, 153
The Maori soldiers were not included in the settlement scheme although some land was provided for them by their own people. 21.

The Land Purchase Board consisted of three men who had the task of buying up land for the Government on which soldiers would be settled. It was often suggested that they were open to corruption and, at best, they made a lot of mistakes. The fault, however, also lay with the Government. Despite constant criticism and obvious errors made by the Land Purchase Board, it was not changed in any way.

Three men simply could not have had experience of most different localities in New Zealand. Their lack of local knowledge meant they were not competent to decide about the suitability of or the price for land. Also, two members of the Board had only South Island experience and the third had never worked outside an office. Guthrie, later the Minister of lands, argued in 1917 that local businessmen and farmers should help the Purchase Board within each district. 22. Unfortunately, nothing came of the idea. A system of this kind could have made the Land Purchase Board less susceptible to the influence of Land Agents and landowners, seeking to make a good profit while values were high.

22. N.Z.P.D., 181 (11 October 1917), 55
The Land Purchase Board was influenced by the high prices for butter-fat which provided a false basis for planning. The proper basis for the value of land should have been the normal value which was laid down by the Land Valuation Department. The effect was that enormous sums were paid for land purchases at high values. This actually tended to inflate the market against the Government. The people whom they bought the land off went into the open market and bought more land and thus, the price of land was steadily raised.  

The Land Purchase Board was supposed to consult the two representatives in each district and local valuers before making a purchase but the system did not function effectively. Many bad buys were made. An example was the Stream-Lands Estate in North Auckland. The Board advertised the land as first class but it was badly infected with gorse and there were large areas of swamp and unploughable land. Only twenty percent of the land was sown in grass. The Minister of Lands admitted in 1921 that mistakes had been made and land purchased which would not now be purchased.  

23. N.Z.P.D., 184 (3 September 1919), 120

Yet nothing was done. Many suggestions about a larger board and local help were repeated but the Government said it was not necessary. The scheme was working well. 25.

The Inquiry Boards in 1923 all reported inflated land values and poor quality sections as a major reason for failure. The Government should have put much more thought into this important area.

It is difficult to know how much actual corruption there was. Some people certainly felt that there was evidence of this and they could hardly be blamed for thinking so. As Robert Masters, M.P. for Stratford, said: "There has been growth bungling so far as the purchase of land for soldiers in this Dominion is concerned. It will be very interesting in years to come when the next party comes to power to go through the pigeon-holes and find some of the dealings that went on". 26. At best, it can be said that the Government made it easy for unscrupulous land-owners to make huge profits at the expense of the soldiers. It also allowed absolutely incompetent valuers to go relatively unchecked.

25. _N.Z.P.D._, 184 (3 September 1919), 132

26. _N.Z.P.D._, 201 (8 August 1923), 658
The District Land Boards which worked under a Commissioner of Crown Lands had four major duties: to subdivide the land; select the soldiers when two or more people applied for a section of land; to act in a supervisory capacity and deal with rents and financial assistance to the soldiers.

The Land Boards did not do a good job generally in the subdivision of land. The surveyors were influenced by the very high returns of produce in the early period. The Land Boards were also pressured by the Government which was anxious for noticeably small units to avoid accusations of land aggregation. The Massey Government had been criticized for holding the large estates intact and building up the city communities. This upset the Reform Party because they wished to appear as champions of the small farmers. Guthrie was constantly pointing out how much land they had subdivided. The Government also reduced the amount of land that the original owner might keep around his house after subdivision. The Reform Party played on fears of amalgamation. They claimed that private landlordism of farmland was rampant in America and could be rampant in New Zealand in fifty years. Few working farmers would own their own land.

27. N.Z.P.D., 197 (4 October 1922), 518
28. Ibid., 519
29. N.Z.P.D., 185 (13 October 1919), 294-5
Table 1

Estates purchased by the Government for subdivision
1st April 1912 - 31st March 1922

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Area (acres)</th>
<th>Price (£)</th>
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<td>North Auckland</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>106131</td>
<td>1025786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auckland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawkes Bay</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>108055</td>
<td>1085875</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taranaki</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23019</td>
<td>290455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellington</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>95751</td>
<td>1742958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24474</td>
<td>120498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlborough</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>106913</td>
<td>379648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>88</td>
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<td>Otago</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>76834</td>
<td>731530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southland</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33715</td>
<td>244174</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total           | 400    | 682283       | £6983901   |

N.Z.P.D., 197 (4 November 1922), 518
At the same time, the Government had found it difficult to control amalgamation. During the period 1916-21, 8924 Crown selections were made but the increase in the number of holdings amounted to only 4530, thus showing a loss as a result of aggregation of 4394 holdings. Thus, the Reform Party supported the small farmer and depended on his vote. At the same time, they faced problems of land amalgamation and were anxious to be seen to be cutting up the estates into small sections. This pressure from the Government is the only way to explain why so many of the soldier settlements were cut up into sections that were too small. The Land Boards were not unduly worried by the size of the farms however. Rather, they continued to argue that it was the inexperience of the soldiers that was causing problems.

The Land Boards also had the task of selecting the best settlers for the land and allotting a farm to a soldier that was suited to his wishes, capabilities and farming experience. It was generally believed in the early years of the scheme that this had been done competently.

30. N.Z.P.D., 197 (4 October 1922), 517
31. N.Z.P.D., 184 (3 September 1919), 135
This claim is borne out by an examination of the application forms for the Gladbrook, Benmore and Clifton estates. Of the fifty-seven soldiers who applied for these three settlements, only seven percent had no experience. Seventeen percent had two to five years experience and seventy six percent of the settlers claimed to have a lifetime of knowledge. Twenty-four percent of the soldiers listed their previous occupation as other than farming but only twenty-one percent of this group had not had previous experience on a farm. Furthermore, only twelve percent of all the farmers came from outside Otago. Therefore, lack of experience cannot possibly have been an important factor in the failure of the soldiers. Rather, it was used by both the Government and the Land Boards as an excuse in order to hide their own mistakes.

The soldiers had to give details of their health when applying but it was not a factor that the selectors were concerned about. Of the fifty-six soldiers who record their physical condition, only twenty-seven percent appear to be in normal health. The rest have all sustained some injury and at least twenty-seven percent to such an extent that it must have affected their farming ability. Surprisingly, there were no complaints about this factor.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Half Yearly Rent</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Previous Occupation</th>
<th>Capital</th>
<th>Status</th>
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<td>Previous Occupation</td>
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<td>Value</td>
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<td>Value</td>
<td>Half Yearly Rent</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Previous Occupation</td>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>Status</td>
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</tr>
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<td>78</td>
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<td>£40</td>
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<td>Railway Surfaceman</td>
<td>£500</td>
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<td>Life</td>
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<td>105</td>
<td>£2240</td>
<td>£50</td>
<td>Stiffness in right hip</td>
<td>Platelayer N.Z.R.</td>
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<td>Single</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>£1810</td>
<td>£40</td>
<td>Left arm &amp; hand Disabled</td>
<td>Farm Lab.</td>
<td>£600</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>5 years</td>
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<td>42</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>£1990</td>
<td>£44</td>
<td>Unfit but can work the land</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>£150</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>8 years</td>
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</table>
Few of the soldiers were wealthy men but this fact was acknowledged and Government advances were available to compensate for the lack of capital. The majority of soldiers selected by the Land Board had sufficient capital to manage under normal conditions. Only twenty-five percent of the applicants had less than a year's rent in capital. Twenty percent had enough money to pay a year's rent, eighteen percent had enough for two years, twelve percent had enough for three years and twenty-five percent had more than this sum. 32.

Although a few soldiers slipped through who clearly should not have, most were as qualified as an ordinary settler. There is no evidence that inefficient selection of soldiers contributed to the failure of the scheme to a significant extent.

In 1923, Mr W.H. Field, M.P. for Otaki, claimed in Parliament that "stock was bought that was quite unsuitable and here I blame the Lands Department, they ought to have been more careful to watch the purchase of stock and other activities of soldier settlers". 33.

32. Lands and Survey Department Application Forms,

33. N.Z.P.D., 201 (8 August 1923), 692.
Government criticism of the Land Boards in this way was quite common by 1923 and unjustified in most cases. It was not the fault of the Land Boards that they were quite unable to give individual attention to the soldiers. This was a matter that the Government should have dealt with at the very beginning by arranging for adequate training and supervision. There was always some awareness of the need to watch the soldiers. No matter how experienced they were, most had been away for several years and needed help to settle down. 34.

There were suggestions that supervisors be appointed to help the soldiers. There was also talk of letting the soldiers work on experimental farms and breaking in the land. The need for education was also stressed. 35. But these important ideas were not developed and the task fell solely upon the Land Board.

Apathy on the part of the Government and a certain belief that it was not a good idea to "wet-nurse" the soldiers meant that there was little help available. 36.

An offer by the Department of Agriculture to train men on their farms was largely ignored. 37.

34. N.Z.P.D., 174 (24 September 1915), 216
35. ibid., 224
36. N.Z.P.D., 176 (29 June 1916), 297
But, anyway, this was not the type of help that the soldiers needed. Most of them were experienced farmers and no doubt felt that further training was unnecessary. The Government should have established compulsory instruction courses and provided adequate supervision on the actual settlements. Also, although the Land Boards recommended the sharing of expensive implements, they felt it was a matter for the settlers and would not interfere. 38 The Land Boards generally felt that the soldiers should be left to stand on their own feet. With the limited number of staff, there was no alternative anyway.

As the soldiers' difficulties became more evident, it was eventually decided to appoint supervisors, who would report to the Land Boards each month. In the past, this had been done by Crown Rangers, a system which had not been particularly successful as many did not have the time or the knowledge to be of use. Unlike the rangers who were practical men, the supervisors were to be selected from the Public Service and many were not experienced, so their chances of success were limited.

It would have been better to get men with local knowledge with whom the settlers would feel more confident. 39. Also, as was suggested, they should have secured the co-operation of local citizens or committees in the same way as was done in the repatriation scheme. Many people were eager to help. At the Stalker Settlement in Southland, the neighbouring settlers ploughed the land for the soldiers and subscribed one hundred pounds for seed. In other settlements, the soldiers received practical help and valuable advice from local Patriotic Societies. 40. Local retired farmers could have assisted the soldiers. As it was, the district supervisors, despite the fact that they were supplied with a motor car, 41. could hardly hope to closely supervise hundreds of soldiers, who faced numerous problems of considerable variety. Adequate supervision would have made it absolutely clear at a much earlier stage that difficulties were not just due to the soldiers' lack of experience. It also seems that the Land Boards fell down in insisting that the soldiers were failing because of lack of knowledge when they did not support a call for adequate help and supervision.

39. N.Z.P.D., 185 (13 October 1919), 284

40. A.J.H.R., 1918, C-9, p7

41. A.J.H.R., 1920, C-9, p4
The other duty of the Land Boards was to deal with the administration of finances. They were encouraged to deal leniently with the soldiers and to assist them in every way possible. The Land Boards generally took advantage of this attitude of Government. There is much evidence of privileges granted, and many postponements and exemptions from rent. 42. An examination of the Land's and Survey Department records in Otago reveals that many of the soldiers were granted postponements of rent. 43. At the same time, the Land Boards were limited in the amount of financial assistance they could give. The Inquiry Boards said that the Governmental advances were inadequate and postponement of rent was often just putting off the evil day. 44.

In general, it can be seen that the machinery to administer the settlement scheme was not satisfactory. The Government failed to develop the Land Boards so they could do a thorough job in subdividing the land and supervising the soldiers. Even worse was the failure of the Government to create a safe and efficient system of land purchase.

42. N.Z.P.D., 201 (8 August 1923), 684
43. Lands and Survey Department, Minutes of the Otago Land Board, 13 February, 1918-14 May, 1919
The three men who comprised the Land Purchase Board were obviously quite unable to cope with the task. The Government did nothing to prevent land being bought at grossly inflated prices. This was one of the major problems of the scheme.
THE ROLE OF PUBLIC OPINION

Chapter Three

"It seems to me the most absurd thing that could be imagined that we should be expected to discuss a report and nobody to know what was in that report."

[Mr Wilford, Leader of the Opposition, N.Z.P.D., 192 (2 November 1921), 70]

The unwillingness of the Massey Government to debate issues fully in Parliament and their failure to consider the various alternative plans meant that mistakes were repeated. An examination of public opinion reveals just how much official reports of what was happening differed from how most people saw things. In addition, The Farmers' Union and the R.S.A. also influenced the scheme and tried to help the soldiers. Their role deserves further examination for it, too, adds weight to the contention that the Government could have done much more to help.

Massey continually stated that he was delighted with the work done in soldier settlement. 2

2. Otago Witness, 3 August 1919, p.41, c.5
Massey was determined that everyone should be convinced of the success of his scheme. He took care, therefore, to avoid any debate in the House. All the opposition had a chance to do was to protest at the unseemly haste with which important measures were being forced through the Chamber. There was no chance for intelligent discussion. When Parliament was asked to authorize the raising of £12,500,000 for soldier settlement, the measure was pushed through in one sitting. The House was only a quarter full and eventually adjourned at twenty past five in the morning. Furthermore, the Opposition was not allowed to read the reports of the Lands Department until after the debates had taken place. While the Massey Government continued to prevent Parliamentary discussion, it was unlikely that mistakes could be corrected.

The Government stated in 1917 that every effort would be made to keep in touch with all sections of the community who were affected by the scheme.

3. *N.Z.P.D.*, 184 (3 September 1919), 160

4. *ibid.*, 163

5. *N.Z.P.D.*, 192 (22 November 1921), 470-71

But, in reality, the Government paid little attention to what the public thought about land settlement. The main suggestions concerned communal farming, compulsory purchase of the big estates and the opening up of Crown Lands.

Many people supported the idea of communal farming for the soldiers. This would have overcome the problems of inexperience, loneliness and expensive implements. In 1919, the Waiotapu Settlers' Association outlined a scheme for the communal development of a large block of land. Soldiers would have in common the woolsheds, cattleyards, and farm implements provided by the Government and used, supervised by officers, at a reasonable rate. But the Government did not seriously contemplate the idea. 7.

The Manager of the Cromwell Development Company suggested they think about an idea being considered in Australia. It was to take a portion of a large estate, cut it into smaller farms and have the estate Manager supervise the soldiers. A farmer's co-operative settlement could be formed and the men could mutually assist one another. Private and public companies with orchard settlements would also settle soldiers on their estates, under a supervisor. 8.

8. Otago Witness, 1 August 1917, p.38. c1.
The Government did not try a co-operative scheme however. This perhaps was because of their belief that the soldiers wanted independence. A scheme of this sort could have helped many soldiers who faced high costs in the purchase of farm implements and felt isolated and lonely.

The Government also rejected the idea of the compulsory purchase of land in order to get it at reasonable rates. The Reform Party had stood on a platform of breaking up the big estates but they took only half-measures. Massey wrote to all the large Land-owners, asking them to submit the whole or a portion of their land for soldier settlers. But compulsory purchase was only threatened, never implemented. Many people were outraged by the profits that some landholders made. In Parliament, it was argued that the increased prices being asked for land, simply because the Government was buying land for soldiers, were simply disgraceful. George Witty, the M.P. for Riccarton, asserted that there was "roguery and villainy" in many of these exchanges. It was suggested that the Government either introduce compulsory purchase at 1914 values or tax landowners at the excessive price that they put on their land.

9. N.Z.P.D., 184 (3 September 1919), 125
10. N.Z.P.D., 185 (6 October 1919), 82
11. N.Z.P.D., 185 (6 October 1919), 82
It was recognized that the present law was costly and cumbersome and a new law for compulsory purchase should be introduced. Although it would be hard on some individuals, it was no more unjust than to take one man to fight and leave the other home. It was argued that land was of less value than life. 12. It was not surprising that bitterness flared up against large landowners who had stayed home and grown rich on the War. It was felt that they should stand aside and let soldiers onto the land at a fair rate. 13. But even the argument that New Zealand was not as radical as the British Parliament was in interfering with the rights of Landowners, in the interests of the nation, failed to move the Government. 14. Massey continued to insist that his policy of buying land for soldiers was not affecting land values or profiting speculators and large landowners. He refused to take the criticism seriously, and his usual response was that people, who ought to know better, should assist and encourage the soldiers instead of hindering them by croaking criticism which did no-one any good. 15.

12. N.Z.P.D., 193 (30 January 1922), 828
13. N.Z.P.D., 185 (13 October 1919), 304
14. N.Z.P.D., 178 (3 July 1917), 383
15. Otago Witness, 6 February 1918, p.46
The other general suggestion to avoid paying high prices to settle the soldiers was to open up the Crown Lands. This would have meant that the soldiers were not committed to prices which would prove economically unsound if the value of New Zealand produce on the London Market should fall. 16. It also meant that the money and energy were put into developing unimproved land rather than estates, which were producing something, however small. 17. The 1918 Dominion Conference of the R.S.A. wanted large blocks of undeveloped Crown Land settled on co-operative lines. This would avoid the problems of inflated land values, and also of placing soldiers in the backblocks to struggle on alone. The Minister of Lands commented favourably on the scheme but nothing was done. 18.

Compulsory purchase and the opening up of Crown lands would both have helped to keep down the price of land. When the Government entered the market as a competitor, high prices were pushed up further. This was the major reason for the failure of the scheme and it could have been prevented.

17. ibid., p. 149.
18. George, "The Depression of 1921-22", p. 149.
CROWN LANDS AVAILABLE

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Overall, therefore, the role of the public was not as important as it might have been in the soldier settlement scheme. People were concerned to prevent the more obvious dangers but no notice was taken of their warnings. On a more general level, most people were anxious for the soldiers to be justly rewarded and content to settle down again in New Zealand. The Government could have channelled their enthusiasm in useful directions instead of alienating them.

There was not a great deal of public pressure on the Government to settle the soldiers on the land. However, there was some dissatisfaction voiced in the South that soldiers were being encouraged to settle in the North. 19. Southland and the West Coast especially felt that they were being discriminated against. 20.

In 1918, the Otautau Standard complained that of the 46271 acres available for the soldier settlers, Southland had a meagre 944 acres, the smallest allotment in the Dominion. It was argued that a strong effort should be made to induce the soldiers to settle in Southland, otherwise the drift north would become more acute. They also hoped to induce the settlement of large numbers of immigrants after the War. 21.

20. N.Z.P.D., 184 (3 September 1919), 149
The West Coast also felt that they had areas of land where settlement should be encouraged but little had been done. 22.

The R.S.A. was organized because it was felt that the soldiers were not being fairly treated on their return to New Zealand. 23. The Association was eager to play a central role in the relationship between the soldiers and everyone else. They wanted to be recognized as the protector of the soldier, and therefore entitled to be consulted and involved in all matters concerning him. 24. Unfortunately, the R.S.A.'s clamouring often went no further than demanding representation. They could have done much more to help the soldiers on an unofficial basis.

The R.S.A. was happy with the basis of the Land settlement scheme, despite the problems apparent by 1918. They were critical of details; they wanted the sections fenced and buildings erected for the soldiers, and tenure reduced from ten to six years, but they basically thought the scheme was "workable". 25.

22. N.Z.P.D., 193 (30 January 1922), 838
23. Quick March, 1 January 1919, p15.
25. Quick March, 1 July 1918, p4.
The R.S.A. also wanted closer supervision of the settlers and when a soldier had limited knowledge, they believed he should work for a suitable farmer in the district. It was unfortunate that the R.S.A. did not introduce a scheme of this nature themselves. They could have arranged help for the soldiers on a local level. But instead of achieving anything very practical, the R.S.A. concentrated on having their status recognized, and achieving permanent representation on the Land Boards.

The R.S.A. maintained a mild interest in the settlement scheme. They wrote to all soldiers, asking for information on their progress. They asked the Minister of Lands to distribute fencing to the settlers at reduced rates. They also continued to make various suggestions about the amount of Government advances, and farming in common, but they continued to refrain from making major criticisms of the scheme.

The R.S.A. was very keen on the idea of a joint Government - R.S.A. committee to deal with the land settlement scheme.

26. ibid.,
27. Quick March, 1 July 1918, p.23
28. ibid.,
Massey declined the idea. Once again, he preferred not to consult the opinions of others. It was foolish for the Government to consistently ignore the requests of the R.S.A. because they could have been very helpful. Mr E. Newman, the M.P. for Rangitikei, argued in Parliament that the R.S.A. should have their scheme if possible because if they could be induced to take an active part in the settlement of men on the land, it would be an enormous help to the Government and the Land Boards.

The R.S.A. set up their own Land Bureau and wanted to run the settlement scheme themselves. They proposed to set up local committees to buy land. The scheme came to nothing when the attention of the R.S.A. was distracted by the Repatriation Act which, to their fury, the Government failed to consult them about. They raged against the absence of the basic principles of democratic Government. They argued, quite rightly, that all groups, including the R.S.A., naturally interested in proposals of national importance, were denied an opportunity of studying the Bill. The Bill was rushed through a tired House in the dying hours of a session.

29. *N.Z.P.D.*, 184 (3 September 1919), 134

30. *Quick March*, 10 July 1919, p.48-

31. *Quick March*, 10 July 1919, p.48-
Infuriated by the lack of co-operation from the Government, the R.S.A. let this issue over-shadow others. As can be seen at Clifton and Benmore, although they involved themselves to some extent, they generally failed to maintain an active interest.

The R.S.A. were also confused about how to approach land settlement. In 1919, Quick March published a very far-sighted article by Professor T.A. Hunter, who argued that there were two fatal weaknesses in the scheme. The first was that training was inadequate because farming was still regarded as an unskilled occupation and the second was the Government buying which was pushing up already inflated land values. He warned that the settlers would not be able to manage when the fall in prices came. 32. Yet the R.S.A. generally failed to recognize the dangers inherent in the scheme. When advances were temporarily stopped, the R.S.A. regarded this with indignation. 33. Although they claimed it was a gross economic blunder for the Government to enter the market as a competitor, they encouraged further settlement. In 1921, they considered it was much too soon to make any extensive or lasting reduction in the operation of the Act. 34.

32. Quick March, 1 January 1919, p.21.
33. Otago Witness, 18 May 1920, p.9, c.4.
34. Quick March, 10 December 1921, p.25.
The R.S.A. moved increasingly towards an unsympathetic position. When the depression compelled the Land Board to relieve many soldier sheep-farmers by postponing rent, the R.S.A. urged these soldiers to pay up as quickly as possible. They said the money was needed to settle more soldiers on the land. In 1921, the R.S.A. was pleased that only 273 soldier farmers out of 9374 had left. The R.S.A. was unable to comprehend how serious the difficulties were. They felt that these figures indicated that most soldier farmers would soon be "round the strong corner". 35.

In 1922, the R.S.A. finally did something practical. They developed a pure-breed stock scheme. This helped many soldiers to raise the quality of their milking needs. People were induced to sell bulls to ex-soldiers at cheap rates. By 1924, the R.S.A. owned 40-50 pure-bred bulls. 36.

35. Quick March, 10 December 1921, p.37.

The R.S.A. were not generally able to fully understand the economic problems of the scheme but they did have something to offer. Their quarrels were over small, petty details which were nevertheless of importance to the settlers concerned. It was in matters such as remitting rent, supplies of grass seed and the various properties available that the R.S.A. was in touch with things. The Government and Land Boards could have obtained useful and much-needed advice from them on these matters. Yet the Massey Government continued to alienate the R.S.A.

Another example of this occurred when the R.S.A. wanted representation on the Inquiry Boards. Guthrie, the Minister of Lands, said it was a waste of money and unnecessary and there was no reason why one section of the community should have special privileges. Mayhew comments that this must have sounded very like heresy to the R.S.A. There were further problems in Otago where the R.S.A. protested against the appointment of Mr Carruthers to the Inquiry Board. He had been the former Manager of the Poplar Grove estate, was married to the daughter of the previous owner, and a beneficiary of the sale.

37. Otago Witness, 18 May 1920, p.9, c4
38. N.Z.P.D., 195 (27 July 1922), 753.
40. N.Z.P.D., 198 (3 October 1922), 448.
Guthrie's reply was that he was well aware that the R.S.A. wanted a nominee of their own on the Board but that he disagreed. After a great deal of resentment had built up, Guthrie finally agreed that the other valuer would deal with Poplar Grove.

Although the R.S.A. were justified in opposing the appointment of Carruthers, they themselves could not have acted in an unbiased manner on the Board. Furthermore, their demand for representation does not appear to have been simply the result of concern for the soldiers. Despite the problems of the depression, they were still stressing that every soldier settler was morally bound to make an earnest endeavour to carry out these obligations to the best of his ability.

The R.S.A. did not have any great success in improving conditions for the settlers. To some extent, this was due to the failure of the Government to listen to their suggestions and co-operate with them. But the R.S.A. often seemed more concerned with their rights and recognition of their status than with the welfare of the soldiers. Furthermore, they did little themselves to help the soldiers in a practical way.

41. ibid.,

42. Otago Witness, 12 June 1923, p.2., c.6.
The Farmers' Union likewise supported the soldier settlement scheme but warned that the land must be workable and accessible. At their conference in 1915, it was urged that the soldiers be given preference for all land. But it was also suggested that as soldiers knew nothing about farming, they should be given preference for their old positions. This note of caution was typical of the farmers. They were more aware of the dangers and did not idealize rural life as other groups did.

The Farmers' Union was critical of the position of the soldier settlers in 1921. It realised that they would face heavy losses. But at the same time, they were concerned with other matters. At the 1923 Annual Conference, little attention was paid to the soldiers' special problems. The Government was urged to reduce the capital value of their land to prevent soldiers losing their farms. But the Farmers' Union was more concerned with measures to help the general farming community - thereby helping the soldiers as a result.

43. T.W.H. Brooking, "Agrarian Businessmen Organize", p. 368
44. Otago Witness, 4 August 1915, p.10, c.2.
45. Otago Daily Times, 10 March 1921, p.8. c.4.
In summary, the Massey Government was unwilling to co-operate with interest groups. They avoided all discussion and criticism of the scheme as far as possible. This was reflected in their parliamentary procedure and also in their refusal to consider the various alternative schemes suggested. Therefore, mistakes were repeated that might have been avoided, and enthusiastic groups, who were eager to help, were alienated. However, many people could have done more for the soldiers. Although soldier settlement was an issue that aroused a great deal of public interest, little of practical use was achieved.
The soldier settlement lands were part of the original Clifton estate. It was situated five miles from Waikera railway station and eight miles from Balclutha. 1. The Government bought the land, an area of 5341 acres, at just under ten pounds per acre. 2. Surveying and roading brought the cost up to about eleven pounds per acre. Many critics felt from the start that too much was paid for Clifton. The Otago Daily Times, for example, claimed that men who knew the neighbourhood and the quality of the land had always held that it was too dearly bought. 3.

The Government and the previous owner naturally denied this, and a local civil war appears to have developed over this issue and others. This chapter will examine the arguments and accusations because it shows how ordinary people felt about such issues as land settlement and rich farmers.


2. A.J.H.R., 1921, C-9

A close look at Clifton reveals the workings of the Government, Land Board and R.S.A. within a specific context. The background of the soldiers and the problems that they faced can also be examined.

The Sections were opened for settlement in March 1917 but only three were taken up, out of twenty-two. There were no houses and no fences and the land was unimproved and covered in old, twitchy pasture. In the same neighbourhood, improved farms with houses and everything in working order could be bought for the same money. The class of land was agriculture, dairying and pastoral. The high prices ruling for stock and the enormous increase in the price of fencing material made things difficult from the start. Three more soldiers joined the settlement in 1918 and even the Land Board described their prospects of success as only fair.

The most outspoken critic of Clifton was Fred Waite (official war historian, Reform M.P. and progressive farmer) who led a personal crusade against the Land Board and Government on behalf of the soldiers.

4. *Quick March*, 10 December 1921, pp. 38-39


Resentment built up in the district when their complaints were not taken seriously. Mr R.D. Sadd, the Commissioner of Crown Lands for Otago, claimed that Clifton had been valued by a gentleman of high repute and with long-standing knowledge of the district, whose valuation had exceeded the price paid by the Government. Five farmers however, four of whom had lived alongside Clifton for fourteen years and more placed the land at an outside value of eight pounds. It became clear very early that a mistake had been made at Clifton. The Industries Committee of the House of Representatives was given evidence in 1919 that the land would carry only one sheep to an acre and a half. The value of a fleece was eleven shillings and the rent of the land was sixteen shillings an acre. To put settlers on such land was clearly wrong.

The Otago Land Board, however, refused to admit that there were problems. Mr Sadd insisted that the settlers at Clifton were going to do alright, in spite of the efforts of some of the local settlers and others to damm the settlement. He described Clifton as quite a good proposition for the men who settled on it.

7. Otago Daily Times, 21 September 1918, Mr Sadd's Scrapebook, p.2.

Nor would the Land Board agree to purchase the Clifton woolshed as common property for the settlers. The R.S.A. was very critical of this decision because it would have saved the expense of twenty-three woolsheds, yard clips and wool presses. Yet, in reply to constant criticism, the Otago Land Board said that all was well; it was only the local settlers working the soldiers up to air chiefly imaginary grievances. Furthermore, it was argued that it was the persistent set made by the local people against Clifton that was seriously retarding its selection.

It was not until 1920 that the Land Board admitted that the subdivision of Clifton was not suitable. This led to the beginning of amalgamation, with five empty sections being joined to the soldiers land. It was also decided to open the sections to the public but they were less interested than the soldiers. Only two members of the public went on and one left after four months. No local settler wanted the block. By December 1921, no fewer than eight settlers had departed from Clifton, in most cases forfeiting their improvements, their savings, their gratuities and their years of labour.

Since three thousand acres of land were lying idle, producing nothing and paying no rates, the farmers of the district signed a petition, asking for a remission of rents and a revaluation. 13.

One hundred signatures were presented to the House and there was support from some politicians.

One member stated that a huge blunder had been made at Clifton. Although this was denied by Guthrie, he had to agree that some mistakes had been made in subdivision. Some politicians were very moved by the plight of the soldiers. One said that "it has been altogether most heart-rending—the most heart-rending one, without any exaggeration in the administration of the R.S.A. Department." 14.

But despite the obvious fact that there were problems at Clifton, the Committee had no recommendation to make. They did not learn from the failure of Pomohaka. The committee said that every encouragement should be given to the settlers and that unoccupied sections should be utilized but they argued that revaluation should wait until conditions were normal again. 15.

13. ibid.,


15. N.Z.P.D., 192 (7 December 1921), 425.
The plight of Charles Grant, a farmer at Clifton, was also brought up in Parliament. Mr Sadd, the Commissioner of Crown Lands in Otago, admitted that the soldier was a good farmer but he owed money all around to trades people and had no funds at all. He was financially tied to the Government and they would give him no further assistance. Nothing was done to help him. The local residents were not prepared to just ignore the problems however. Quick March declared defiantly that: "The campaign has only begun. We will wait a little to see what the Government intends to do in regard to the settlement of the unoccupied part of Clifton and then we must start again." The local people were frustrated by their inability to effect improvements for the soldiers. Consequently, a debate raged in the Otago Daily Times and probably at a more personal level over who was to blame for the problems at Clifton.

Mr Telford, the previous owner of Clifton, and Mr Pannett, a wealthy neighbouring farmer, took the view that the price paid for the land was justified and the soldiers were not doing well because they were inexperienced and not trying hard enough.

16. ibid., 879

Mr Pannett had little sympathy for the soldiers. He felt that they resented his success, when he had worked hard for years and they were just starting. He told the farmers that they should work their farms as zealously as they fought the war. Mr Pannett claimed that there was nothing wrong with the land and anyone with experience would have done well. He also claimed that there was only one genuine farmer at Clifton. 18. A check of the soldiers' application forms revealed this to be quite incorrect (see Table 4). Mr Pannett admitted that the rents were too high but insisted that lack of experience was the main problem. Fred Waite replied that Mr Pannett had amassed a fortune by ingloriously staying at home. 19.

Mr Telford also insisted that the soldiers were doing badly because of lack of experience. He argued that the price of land was not too high when the producing capacity of the land, prior to 1917, was taken into account. Had the Government placed the right type of settler on Clifton prior to the slump, they would have managed to cope with the depression. 20.

18. Otago Daily Times, 1 October 1921, p.14, c.5.


This was a false conclusion as the Government could not get anyone to take the Clifton sections, and the few who attempted it were as competent as most.

Supporters of the soldiers were also very outspoken on the problems at Clifton. It was an issue that disturbed people deeply. Waite claimed that the history of Clifton pointed unquestionably to the commission of a grave mistake in the purchase of the estate. The rents were consequently too high and the sections too small. Despite the general land hunger, therefore, the Land Board could not get anyone to take up sections there. According to Waite, the greatest factor operating from 1917 was the high price for land and that was responsible for frightening even the adventurous soldiers. 21.

Local settlers generally agreed with Waite that the price paid was the main problem. One writer to the Otago Daily Times described Clifton as "the biggest white elephant that the Lands Department has had the misfortune to handle - because the state paid too much for second class country." 22. Many correspondents to the paper claimed that improved land could be bought for the same price. People were also angry that Mr Telford had carefully cut away the best land from the soldiers and reserved it for himself. 23.

22. Otago Daily Times, 7 November 1921, p.6, c.5.
23. ibid.
The *Otago Daily Times* accused Telford of deliberately selling the land at an over-valued price when he knew that the market conditions, which might have justified the price at the time, could not possibly endure. 24. People were outraged by such treatment of soldiers whom they felt deserved decent treatment, but were being forced out, having to forfeit all their money and years of work. 25.

Mr Wilford, the leader of the Opposition, suspected doubtful practices in the purchase of Clifton. He claimed that the Land Purchase Board had declined the property and only re-opened the matter after a very strong letter was written, suggesting that the land be bought. 26. A member of the Lands Committee admitted that Clifton had originally been turned down and the Government had instructed them to push on with the purchase. 27.

When the Government finally admitted that the settlement was a failure, they did nothing to improve the situation. The Opposition urged them to act for the good of the soldiers. They were encouraged to stop worrying about whose fault it was and to concentrate on putting the settlement on a sound footing.

25. *Otago Daily Times*, 20 September 1921, p.3, c.C1
26. *N.Z.P.D.*, 192 (18 November 1921), 426
27. ibid., 424
The long discussion without action was only furthering the impression that the land was no good. Also, three thousand acres lying out of cultivation was a greater loss to the country than the reduction or loss of rents. 28.

Where the Government failed above all else was in their slowness in reacting to obvious mistakes. As Fred Waite said:

"All this may be forgiven. We are all liable to make mistakes. The trouble with Clifton now is a very common one. Clifton is such a serious business - serious to the country at large for the loss is great; and exceedingly serious for those unfortunate fellows who took up sections there, for their losses are overwhelming." 29.

The soldiers have left few records of what they thought. They generally did not take a forward role in the campaign led by Waite.

28. N.Z.P.D., 192 (18 November 1921), 424

29. Otago Daily Times, 20 September 1921, p.3, c:Cl-3
They did protest at being called lazy and incompetent however. One soldier wrote indignantly that they had as much capital and experience as at least ninety percent of the settlers, both soldier and civilian. 30. Another pointed out how impressed the Land Board had been by the amount of work done by the soldiers at Clifton. 31. The soldiers realised that the main problems were the high cost paid for the land, together with the cost of improving and working the farms. The stock and station agents would not finance them because the land was too expensive. 32.

A study of the application forms for Clifton reveals that the soldiers failed because they were placed on over-priced land that could not be made to pay. Ninety two percent of the settlers had experience in farming. It is clear that lack of knowledge was not an important factor in explaining the failure of the scheme. Of the soldiers who left, forty four percent had a lifetime of experience, forty four percent had two to five years and only twelve percent had none. Of the successful soldiers, eight percent had a lifetime of experience and twenty percent had two to five years.

30. Otago Daily Times, 1 October 1921, p.14, c.5.
31. Otago Daily Times, 14 October 1921, p.9, c.2.
32. Otago Daily Times, 1 October 1921, p.14, c.5.
### APPLICATIONS FOR CLIFTON

#### Lands and Survey Department - Applications 6233-6440

#### Table 4

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry and Percy Wright</td>
<td>Clifton</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>£3110</td>
<td>£69</td>
<td>Farm Labourer</td>
<td></td>
<td>£3110</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>OK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Those who survived did have more long-term experience on average. They were better equipped to deal with the problems. The failures, however, would have been quite able to cope in normal circumstances. Furthermore, all the farmers at Clifton came from the surrounding districts and were not unfamiliar with the type of land they were farming.

More surprisingly, although some of the soldiers were in a very poor state of health, it did not make any difference to their chances of success. It is difficult to determine what exactly was wrong in some cases but it seems that of the failures, thirty three percent were seriously disabled, thirty three percent had more minor injuries and thirty three percent were fully fit. Of those who succeeded, twenty percent had serious health problems, twenty percent had minor injuries and sixty percent were fit. The successful settlers overall were in a better state of health but there is no real difference in the physical condition of the two groups. There were no complaints that this factor was affecting the work of the soldier settlers.

What was a significant point was the amount of private capital that a soldier had.
The average income of the soldiers who left was ninety-five pounds while the average income of the successful farmers was three hundred and six pounds. Thus, while experience and health made no real difference to a soldiers chances of success, private capital did. Those with enough money behind them to start off with were able to survive the difficult period and buy up more land in order to break even. It is clear then that the land was too expensive and the Government advances inadequate. The scheme was supposed to help men of small means to get onto the land but it is obvious that at Clifton, only the relatively wealthy could succeed.

Only eleven percent of those who left were married, compared with forty percent of those who were successful. This would tie in with the fact that they had more capital and were also probably older, on average. Overall, only thirty five percent of the settlers who went onto Clifton were successful, while sixty four percent left, having to forfeit all their money and work.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1917</th>
<th>1918</th>
<th>1919</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1921</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>John Burke</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sunk a lot of money</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Robert Gordon</td>
<td></td>
<td>Forced sale to meet liabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>1921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Charles Grant. Did a lot of work. Argued with Board and left.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Taken by a Civilian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>James Langshail</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Matin Selin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Old Homestead</td>
<td>Withheld from sale at first</td>
<td>Joined with S23</td>
<td>Civilian left after 4 months</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>William Rogers</td>
<td>Built a home. Fenced and did a lot of work</td>
<td></td>
<td>Threw it up</td>
<td>Still Vacant</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Herbert Wright</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Percy Wright</td>
<td>Added to 16S and 17S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Charles Cameron</td>
<td>Lot of improvements threw it up</td>
<td>Idle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Charles Cameron</td>
<td></td>
<td>Still held</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Added to S22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>William Dolan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grouped with Homestead</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>George Perry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Robert Heath</td>
<td></td>
<td>Henry &amp; Percy Wright</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 1921, there were only five soldiers and one civilian at Clifton, and five of the sections were amalgamated with others. Early in 1922, the Government appointed a manager at Clifton. He controlled 3200 acres, comprising all the unallotted portion of the estate and the sections abandoned by the soldiers. It was reported in 1922 that the manager had worked wonders in bringing some of the paddocks into cultivation that had been left in the old grass for as many as twenty-four years. The Government aimed to make it suitable for the successful settlement of small capital farmers in the near future.

Clifton as a soldier settlement was clearly a complete failure. A comparison can be drawn with Pomohaka where the settlers were constantly blamed and yet there was little difference between them and other settlers. The major problem at Clifton was that too much was paid for the land. Land prices were already inflated and Clifton was still comparatively expensive. This suggests the possibility of corruption. The settlement was troubled from the beginning. Few soldiers would take up sections. Most of those who tried found they could not manage. Because the land was lying idle, the sections furthered deteriorated.
When the settlers arrived, they had to rail feed from Southland. The situation was made worse because the Government and the Land Board refused to face the problems. Despite a great deal of criticism from concerned neighbours, nothing was done for years. Consequently, many soldiers lost all they had put into their farms.
Benmore sheep station provides another example of a soldier settlement. The Government already owned the property and so over-priced land and high rents were not a problem. Yet the situation was very like Clifton in many ways. Problems were evident from the beginning; sub-divisions were too small and took no account of the terrible winter weather conditions. Finance, too, was a difficulty. But despite pleas for help from sympathetic neighbours, the Government did nothing to help the soldiers in the early years. As was the case with Clifton, problems were simply denied. A close study of Benmore reveals again the feelings of the general public about the soldiers' settlement. The extent to which the R.S.A. stood by the soldiers can also be seen.

Benmore Station was situated in the Waitaki County, North Otago, near Omarama. 1.

1. Otago Daily Times, 18 July 1921, p.9, c.2.
The question of sub-dividing Benmore first came to the fore in 1914. It was still held under three leases issued in the 1890's, covered an area of 316,880 acres and was one of the last great runs in the district to be broken up. 2.

There was public interest in Benmore from the beginning. In November 1915, a large public meeting at Ngaparuhu passed two resolutions:

- that the Benmore runs be retained for settlement by returned soldiers.

- that the Government be asked to postpone the settlement of Benmore runs for twelve months. 3.

John Anstey, the Member of Parliament for the district, also wanted the sub-division held up until all the soldiers were back. Massey replied, however, that they could not allow productive land to remain idle any longer. Both Massey and the Otago Land Board rejected the idea of reserving all the property for returned soldiers.


3. ibid., p. 24.
It was felt that this would not be a good idea because a great deal of capital was needed to stock and fence the big runs on the hills. Soldiers with sufficient capital could apply if they wished to, but only 23,000 acres of the best land at the lowest elevation would be reserved for the soldiers alone. These twelve proposed farms were thought to be best suited to men with little capital.

Poor subdivision of the land proved to be the major problem at Benmore. The soldiers were given no higher land to provide food and shelter for the sheep in winter. In 1895 half a million sheep had been lost in Waitaki because of intense cold and starvation. The flats were a scene of desolation. In July 1903 everything was under three feet of snow. There was not a living sheep on the whole flat up to the station. The snow was too frozen to get the winter feed out. The local doctor described it as "the worst scene of desolation I ever saw in my life. ...Nothing could live for the snow. Only the livestock on the steep sidings were saved because the wind blew the snow off". The same conditions occurred in 1908.
The Otago Witness correspondent found it unbelievable that any body of men could be so foolishly incredulous, in spite of such evidence read out to them, and do such a cruel thing as to put settlers on land where disaster would overtake them before very long. But despite warnings, the soldiers were given no safe land.

Poor sub-division was partly the result of Government pressure on the Land Boards. There was also a possibility of corruption. When the neighbouring Omarama run was sub-divided in 1915 there was pressure from the public for small sub-divisions. This probably influenced the Land Board when cutting up Benmore. When Anstey inspected the Benmore runs in December 1915, he claimed that the sub-divisions could be increased from thirty seven to more than sixty. He congratulated the Land Board on making the first attempt (since the breaking up of the big estates) to cut the runs down to a carrying capacity of two or three thousand sheep but he still felt they could go further. This pressure helps to explain why the soldier farms were increased from an original twelve to fifteen.

5. Otago Witness, 22 January 1919, p.16.


7. ibid., p.26
The Government was under some pressure because of accusations that they were allowing land amalgamation. Mr George John from Otago claimed that many of the runs at Benmore went to people who already had more land than they ought to have occupied. There was also some suggestion of manipulation between the Crown and the University which owned Endowment land at Benmore. Mr Anstey argued that "the manipulation and exchange that took place between those lands was neither more nor less than a crime". He also claimed that because of these corrupt practices, the soldiers had to be given sections that were too small, and without safe land.

The preference block at Benmore - the Homestead Block - was given to the representatives of the outgoing owners. They paid a very small rent of three hundred and seventy-five pounds a year when, judged by the price of adjoining land, it should have been about a thousand pounds. The 14,500 acres carried about six thousand sheep and could have been cut into several sheep farms. Public opinion was especially critical of this action because the man had not gone to the War.

8. N.Z.P.D., 176, (29 June 1916), 294
9. N.Z.P.D., 184 (3 September 1919), 161
10. ibid.,
11. N.Z.P.D., 185 (3 October 1919), 290
There was only a limited demand for land by returned soldiers and in 1917 four out of the fifteen sections remained unselected. \(^{12}\) Controversy raged in the press and at public meetings as to whether the land allotted to the soldiers at Benmore was sufficient for them to make a living. It was clear after two seasons that they could not. With the exception of a few soldiers who had over two thousand acres of land, all the settlers lost over fifty percent of their stock. This problem was exacerbated when deer ate out the crops and left the soldiers without feed. A correspondent to the *Otago Witness* asked the pertinent question:

"Is it a fair thing for the Government to put the men on these runs to face all the difficulties and worries after having 'done their bit' for their Country"? He added that many of the men were broken in health and often not able to do the hard work on their farms. How they were going to live the next year and restock their farms was a major problem. \(^{13}\).

One of the soldiers left in 1917 and two more in 1919. When one of the soldiers fell behind in payments, the whole of his stock and plant was seized, conveyed to the saleyards and sold. \(^{14}\).


14. *N.Z.P.D.*, 184 (3 September 1919), 161
One of the heaviest losses was suffered by a very experienced farmer whose flock was considered one of the best on the settlement. He lost two hundred sheep because their feed was under snow. 15.

Benmore was forty miles from the railway and with cartage at about two pounds per ton, this meant a substantial decrease in profits. The farmers lacked implements to work up the land and they could not afford wire-netting to protect the crops from ducks and rabbits. 16.

Yet despite clear evidence that the soldiers at Benmore were in serious trouble, there was no mention of problems of any sort in the Land Boards reports of 1917 and 1918. In 1919, Mr Sadd reported that most of the soldiers were doing well and most of the others were in a fair way to make a decent living. It was admitted that there had been heavy stock losses the previous winter but, Mr Sadd argued, this was not due to the snow but, rather, to the inexperience of the soldiers. 17.

No mention was made of any other factors.

15. Mr Sadd's scrapebook, p.5.
16. ibid.,
An examination of the application forms for Benmore proves that Mr Sadd is incorrect. Of the fifteen soldiers at Benmore, six percent had three years experience, only twelve percent had none and all the rest had a lifetime of knowledge and experience. It was the poor quality of the land that was causing problems. Of the settlers at Benmore, forty percent left before 1921, forty percent left before 1924 and the remaining twenty percent left by 1933. Those who stayed longest actually had less capital than the others. The first group had an average capital of two hundred and three pounds, the second group had an average of three hundred and ten pounds and the third group had an average of only one hundred pounds. However, this third group was paying an average rent of thirty four pounds while the second group was paying an average of thirty pounds and the first group twenty-seven pounds. Success, therefore, was related to who was paying the highest rent and therefore who leased the best land. The rents in themselves were not necessarily too high. The soldiers did not need a great deal of capital on the best sections. But the soldiers paying the lowest rents were on the worst land and therefore, although they had more capital, were unable to survive the huge stock losses and destruction of crops.
## Applications for Benmore

### 1916

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Capital Value</th>
<th>Half Yearly Rent</th>
<th>Previous Occupation</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Capital</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Health</th>
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<td>William Gordon</td>
<td>Dunedin</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>1810</td>
<td>£2200</td>
<td>£27</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
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<td>£300</td>
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<td>538</td>
<td>2531</td>
<td>£2400</td>
<td>£30</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
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<td>Kurow</td>
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<td>2892</td>
<td>£3300</td>
<td>£41</td>
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<td>Kurow</td>
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<td>1496</td>
<td>£1675</td>
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<td>Kurow</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>1496</td>
<td>£1675</td>
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<td>Address</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Acres</td>
<td>Capital Value</td>
<td>Half Yearly Rent</td>
<td>Previous Occupation</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Health</td>
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<td>Edmond Davey</td>
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<td>564</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>£1200</td>
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<td>1006</td>
<td>£2070</td>
<td>£23</td>
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<td>Life</td>
<td>£100</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Broken Health but OK now</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas Cooper</td>
<td>Otematata</td>
<td>558</td>
<td>1327</td>
<td>£2100</td>
<td>£26</td>
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<td>30 Years</td>
<td>£100</td>
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<td>557</td>
<td>801</td>
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<td>Cromwell</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>824</td>
<td>£1795</td>
<td>£23</td>
<td>Shepherd 4 Years</td>
<td>On a Run with Father</td>
<td>£206</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Peurasthemia Improving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1919 Applications 6441 - 6641
Experience was not an important factor in failure, but as at Clifton, the successful soldiers did have more long-term knowledge on average. The two soldiers in the third group who replied both had been farming all their lives. In the second group, eighty-three percent had a lifetime of experience while sixteen percent had a few years. In the first group, fifty percent had been farming all their lives, while thirty-three percent had a few years and sixteen percent had none. Therefore, while nearly all the soldiers were qualified enough to deal with normal conditions, long-term experience may have been helpful in dealing with the serious problems faced at Benmore.

Although many of the soldiers faced health problems, it made little difference to their success or failure. The third group are again slightly better off with the soldiers all suffering minor injuries. The first and second groups both had fifty percent seriously injured and fifty percent with minor injuries.

Health and experience then were slightly more satisfactory in the case of the successful soldiers but in no way did these factors make a significant contribution to success or failure. Nor did private capital make any difference.
Rather, it was only the soldiers on the best land who survived. It is evident that soldiers on the poorer sections faced such insurmountable difficulties that factors such as capital made no difference.

The R.S.A. was aware of the problems of Benmore from the beginning. Mr Sadd had met with them in 1916 to discuss the soldiers' grievances. They complained that the blocks were too small and the advances for fencing inadequate. Sadd agreed that the price of fencing was a burden. When the lack of safe ground was mentioned, Sadd said that no one on the station was better off because 18000 sheep had been lost on Benmore in 1908. The R.S.A. naturally then asked why the land had ever been cut up if previous losses were so bad. Sadd eventually agreed that hill country would help but then fencing would be more difficult. 18. The R.S.A. continued to protest haphazardly about various problems. One of the soldiers at Benmore was on a swamp section that had to be drained and he lost one hundred and fifty ewes in a matter of weeks. The R.S.A. claimed that he should be exempt from rent but the Land Board disagreed. 19.

Unfortunately, the R.S.A. did not continue to fight for an improvement of conditions at Benmore. Towards the end of 1919, they decided to take no further action. Although they maintained that the subdivisions were too small, they conceded that as the fences were erected, it was too late for change. 20.

The soldiers faced a continuing lack of sympathy from Mr Sadd. He maintained that Benmore settlers were quite happy and going to do well. Consequently, the Benmore settlers were in the same kind of frustrating situation as the soldiers at Clifton. Once again, the problems of the soldiers upset a large number of people. Various accusations began to be made around the neighbourhood. One correspondent claimed that a wealthy father who already owned several properties had drawn a section on behalf of his absent son. 22. Another applicant for Benmore was inadvertently passed who was ineligible and there was an outcry in the district. The Oamaru Mail carried a large heading - "The Benmore Scandal", vilifying the members of the Board as if they had committed a felony. 23.


22. Oamaru Mail, 3 April 1918, Mr Sadd's Scrapebook, p.6.

It was also alleged that Benmore had fallen into the hands of speculators and the best part of the land had been given to young gentlemen who had not gone to the war. The soldiers grievances tended to serve as a focal point around which more general resentments concentrated. A lot of bitterness against men who did not go to the war was expressed. One indignant letter writer asserted that one of the successful applicants for a larger holding was a member of a family of aggressive anti-militants, who had openly jeered at recruits and made a boast of their contempt for patriotic meetings. It was obviously important to people that the soldiers were justly rewarded and the men who did not serve in the forces should not be able to participate in land settlement. This feeling bordered on the irrational at times, despite serious problems faced by the soldiers.

On the Government's side, feelings also ran high. Massey claimed that the know-alls had no basis for their criticism and should not be criticizing experts.

24. Oamaru Mail, 3 April 1918, Mr Sadd's Scrapebook, p.6.
25. Oamaru Mail, 3 April 1918, Mr Sadd's Scrapebook, p.6.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7</th>
<th>LAND TENURE ON BENMORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>536</td>
<td>1916 Anderson $\rightarrow$ 1928 Aubrey and 2 others $\rightarrow$ 1957 Brewers Run Ltd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>537</td>
<td>1916 Gordon $\rightarrow$ 1921 Sanders $\rightarrow$ 1927 Dasler $\rightarrow$ 1930 Woods $\rightarrow$ 1945 Clifton $\rightarrow$ 1970 Brewers Run Ltd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>538</td>
<td>1916 Wraight $\rightarrow$ 1917 Wolton $\rightarrow$ 1924 Woods $\rightarrow$ 1944 Munro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>539</td>
<td>1916 Aubrey $\rightarrow$ 1924 Woods $\rightarrow$ 1944 Munro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>559</td>
<td>1919 Glenn $\rightarrow$ 1933 Forfeited $\rightarrow$ 1934 McKinnon $\rightarrow$ 1966 Neholl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>557</td>
<td>1918 Reid $\rightarrow$ 1928 G.H. Woods $\rightarrow$ 1934 J.S. Woods $\rightarrow$ 1944 McAughrie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>558</td>
<td>1917 Cooper $\rightarrow$ 1923 Reid $\rightarrow$ 1928 G.H. Woods $\rightarrow$ 1934 J.S. Woods $\rightarrow$ 1944 McAughrie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

560  1919 McDonald → 1920 Hond → 1925
    Munro → 1933 Sanders → 1942
    McAughtie

561  1916 McCready → 1919 Dasler → 1925
    Sanders → 1942 McAughtie

562  1916 Kerr → 1924 McAughtie

563  1916 Williams → 1924 McAughtie

564  1916 Davey → 1919 Bain → 1925
    Shirres → 1961 Black Stock

540  1916 Bain → 1924 Shirres → 1961
    Black stock

542  1916 Carmichael → 1923 Dasler → 1925
    Smith → 1926 Shirres → 1961
    Black stock

N.J. Mains, "Land Tenure on Benmore Sheep Station," p. 89
The Depression greatly increased the problems of the settlers on Benmore. Wright Stephenson were financing nearly all the settlers and early in 1922 threatened to stop all credit if something was not done to alleviate the situation. 27. Five of the soldiers had left by 1920 and a further seven by 1924.

As well as financial difficulties, the soldiers must have faced very real human problems. Although they have not left any personal accounts, a strong general impression remains. One of the soldiers, Robert Smith, was put on Benmore with no farming experience whatsoever and only one hundred pounds capital. He was also suffering from extensive disability. The other soldiers were not so badly off as this but most would have found things difficult because of their state of health. Several soldiers had injured limbs and one had trench fever. Others faced partial or extensive disability and in one case the settler's health was described as "shattered". Many of the soldiers were no doubt suffering from psychological and nervous disorders as well.

27. Mains, "Land Tenure on Benmore Sheep Station", p.60
Loneliness was also a problem for settlers in an area such as Benmore. After years of being continuously with other people, these soldiers were placed on isolated back-country farms. It was not surprising that at least one settler left Benmore because of mental illness. Things were difficult too for the families of the soldiers. The booklet advertising Land Settlement had warned:

"The farmer's wife should not be a serf on the farm, neither should the welfare of his children be prejudiced by their labour being unduly conscripted. The raising of strong, healthy, well-educated and good-living children is of immeasurably greater importance than the raising of quickly-fattened pigs or an improved strain of cattle." 28.

These enlightened words were of no use in a situation such as Benmore, however. The soldiers on the smaller blocks were expected to work part-time to supplement their income.

28. New Zealand Expeditionary Forces Education Department, Land Settlement in New Zealand, p.5.
This meant that the settlers often had to be away for weeks on end and the bulk of the farm work was left to the wife and children of the soldier. The weather conditions were also unpleasant and it was very difficult for families living in poorly built houses.

The education of the soldiers' children also suffered. The country schools were not built to cope with the influx of settlers. Children from country schools did not do as well as others in exams, although the results were weighted in their favour. The Government did recognize this problem and attempt to improve things for the children of small settlers in the back districts. Schools with one to nine pupils were granted an increase from six pounds per pupil in 1917 to fifteen pounds per pupil in 1920. Teachers in the back country were exempted from the education cuts. Nevertheless, the children from places such as Benmore remained at a disadvantage, particularly when they had to do a lot of farm work.

29. Mr Sadd's Scrapebook, p.5.
30. Otago Witness, 22 January 1919, p.16
31. N.Z.P.D., 181 (11 October 1917, 41
32. Reforms Records and Achievements, p.34
There was some awareness among a few politicians that you had to cater for the soldier in a manner that best suited his condition of mind after he returned from the front. As Mr Newman said; "You have got to understand the human side of things before you can thoroughly understand how best to settle the soldiers". It was recognized that loneliness would pose problems for men who had been to the front and whose nerves might be affected. It was suggested that attractive cottages be placed on the farms to encourage them to marry. But the settlement of the soldiers on the small, isolated farms at Benmore showed no consideration for their needs.

It seems clear that Benmore should never have been subdivided in the first place; it was not suitable to be farmed in small units. The run holders on the University Endowment Lands at Benmore also faced problems. These sections had been divided in 1916 but the rents were too high and inevitable disaster followed; eleven run holders were served with notices of forfeiture in three months. Most of these run holders also had a life-time of experience.

33. N.Z.P.D., 181 (11 October 1917), 41
34. N.Z.P.D., 184 (3 September 1919), 152
They marched on Parliament in 1923 when their lands were under snow from four feet to four feet ten inches deep.

Amalgamation of Land, which the Government had sought to avoid, became inevitable at Benmore. The situation of the soldiers made it easy for wealthy men to aggregate land. One man, J.S. Woods, took up two runs in 1924 and 1927. Dasler, an employee of Woods and acting as a dummy for him, took over another farm. In 1928, Wood's brother took up two sections but was not successful and had to forfeit them. Only Woods had the necessary capital to take them up.

Thus, the major problem at Benmore was the poor subdivision, associated with bad weather, isolation and second rate land. Soldiers with more than average capital and experience were unable to cope. By the end of the 1920's, only one of the original settlers was left and his run was forfeited in 1932. Many of the Benmore settlers were just able to scrape a living.

35. Otago Witness, 10 July 1923, p.17, C.C.4-5

36. Mains, "Land Tenure on Benmore Sheep Station", p.65
They did not depart as frequently as the soldiers at Clifton, but overwhelming problems eventually got the better of them. The Land Board and the Government, through a lack of thought and failure to rectify their mistakes, brought about the very situation they had sought to avoid. The soldier settlers were forced off the land, losing their money and improvements, and the land was amalgamated by men with capital. In 1976, there were only five tenants on the soldiers' runs and most of them also farmed land outside the settlement as well. Therefore, Benmore was a complete failure as a means of rewarding the soldiers and placing them on the land.
"The amount of gambling and swindling that is taking place in the way of land deals is positively a disgrace. It is nothing short of a calamity to allow the unimproved value of our land to increase at the rate of about £12000000 every year".


Many soldier settlers faced grave difficulties from the beginning. The 1921-22 depression spelled ruin for many more. Land speculation had been something of a problem since 1895. Prices had kept ahead of costs and money was borrowed in the expectation that this situation would continue. The problem was intensified with the war and the commandeering system.

The value of New Zealand's principle exports rose from £21,000 in 1914 to £43,000 in 1919. These high profits had the effect of escalating land values. Thus, the Government entered the Land Market as a competitor, pushing up already inflated values and increasing the rapid rate of land turnover.

Sinclair describes the result of turning loose 2200 new purchasers with £22.6 million of borrowed money as "an orgy of gambling". In the period 1915-21, forty percent of the total occupied land in New Zealand changed hands. Five or six mortgages on farm land were not uncommon.

A wide range of well-informed groups criticized the land speculation and warned that a depression would result. Mr Sadd told the Government in 1919 that their policy of buying land was inflating values. He advised their waiting until prices returned to normal or taking properties at a Government valuation. Mr Payne suggested in Parliament that they take a course followed in Germany and take eighty percent of the unearned increment of the value of an estate when it was sold.

3. N.Z.P.D., 201 (3 July 1923), 639
5. George, "The Depression of 1921-22", p.112
6. ibid., pp.16-20
7. A.J.H.R., 1919, C-9, p.9
8. N.Z.P.D., 178 (13 July 1917), 389
But the N.Z.F.U. failed to realise the extent and possible consequences of land speculation and nor did the Government heed the warnings. 9.

In 1921, the export prices of primary produce began to fall rapidly. The boom ended because of the international economy adjusting to post-war conditions and the ending of the commandeer system. 10. From 1895-1920, stock and station agents, finance and insurance companies, the commercial banks and private investors had readily supplied credit to the rural community. The value of the land was often the only security. When prices stopped rising, the whole system of rural credit crumbled. 11. Loans were called in and practically all advances of credit were cut off.

High land values and other problems had already forced many soldiers off the land. Those who went in early and weathered the difficulties generally survived the slump. But the depression was devastating for those who had acquired land in the boom year of 1920. 12.

9. George, "The Depression of 1921-22", p.15
12. ibid., p.p.160-162
Even the Land Boards, although they complained about the soldiers lacking the necessary spirit of energy and self-reliance, were very worried about the chances of these soldiers. Particularly affected were the settlers on the large pastoral runs. Their stock depreciated to one third of its former value and there was an enormous depreciation in the value of wool and meat.

The Government, however, was not sympathetic to the plight of the soldier. Mr J. Nosworthy, the Minister of Agriculture, urged the soldiers to work hard and increase production. They were reassured that prices would readjust before very long. The Government acted in the belief that prosperity had only temporarily disappeared and would soon appear of its own accord. They were reluctant to intervene in the economy. The Government became very sensitive to the position of the soldier settlers. They agreed to remit rent in extreme cases but insisted that land values had been reasonable at the time of purchase. They claimed the soldiers were no worse off than anyone else and it was not in their interests for the matter to be brought up daily.

14. N.Z.P.D., 193 (30 January 1922), 842  
15. Otago Daily Times, 4 March 1921, p.3.  
16. N.Z.P.D., 190 (14 March 1921), 36-37
However, the soldiers were in a much worse position because they had gone on to the land at the height of the boom and they had no reserves of capital to fall back on. Facing a great deal of criticism, the Government became extremely defensive, insisting that inexperience was causing the problems.  

Guthrie stated rather ironically that "no other country in the world has done for its returned soldiers what New Zealand has done".  

The 1922 Report on the Soldier Settlements painted a grim picture. Many of the soldiers were unable to get started, being on very poor land, covered with twitch and couch grass. The pasture had degenerated and they could not afford fertilizer. Guthrie still felt there was no need for anxiety. But Massey was finally forced into action.

17. N.Z.P.D., 193 (30 January 1922), 818
18. ibid.,
19. A.J.H., 1922, C-9, p.6
20. N.Z.P.D., 198, (24 October 1922), 482
After the 1922 election, Reform clung to power with the support of three independents. In Massey's own province of Auckland, thousands of small farmers were on the edge of bankruptcy and a Country Party, formed in 1922, threatened to take votes away from Reform. It was finally admitted the soldiers'pathways had not been "strewn with roses" and in 1922, the Government decided to set up Inquiry Boards. They refused to contemplate any idea of revaluation; the Boards were to review the work of the Land Boards, and make them a scapegoat for the scheme.

An Inquiry Board of two men was formed in each district. All the members were farmers except for two land valuers. They visited some of the settlements and spoke to practical men in the district. All the soldiers were invited to give evidence.


22. N.Z.P.D.*, 193 (30 January 1922), 815

23. N.Z.P.D.*, 195 (19 July 1922), 500

Although the Inquiry Boards found that the problems varied from district to district, only in Hawke's Bay, Marlborough and Southland was overpriced land not given as a major reason for the failure of the scheme. The Boards found that most settlers in Nelson and Canterbury would have been in difficulty without the slump. The same was true to a lesser extent in Otago, Wellington, Westland and Southland. It was only the settlers in North Auckland, Taranaki, Hawke's Bay, Marlborough and Auckland that would have generally managed, but for the depression. (See Table 9).

Although the Inquiry Boards were appointed by the Government and given set problems to choose from, they appear to have given an accurate assessment of the situation. They also established beyond all doubt that something had to be done - they assessed the number of soldiers in difficulty at fifty percent. Although they only saw 4322 out of 7635 settlers, they did not account for the large number of soldiers who had already departed. (See Table 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Number of Farms</th>
<th>Percentage that were Unsuccessful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Auckland</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auckland</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawkes Bay</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taranaki</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellington</td>
<td>753</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlborough</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westland</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otago</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southland</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of Successful Farms: 50.6

Percentage of Temporarily Unsuccessful: 30.7

Percentage of failures: 18.7

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Table 8

FINDINGS OF THE INQUIRY BOARDS
**FINDINGS OF THE INQUIRY BOARD**

Percentage of farms at present unprofitable which would be successful under normal conditions and with good management.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Auckland</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auckland</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawkes Bay</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taranaki</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellington</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlborough</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westland</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otago</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southland</td>
<td>44.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*A.-J.-H.R.*, 1923, C-9, p.22
The Government was forced to take action. Yet the debate on the Inquiry Board reports proved to be another example of the undemocratic methods of the Massey Government. The Opposition were not allowed copies of the Report before the debate. Massey said it did not matter because the facts were easy to pick up. Mr Wilford received his copy half-way through Massey's introductory speech and he had to follow him in debate. In many ways, the depression provided a convenient way out for the Government. Massey blamed all the soldier's problems onto the slump. He also claimed to have warned those who said that land values would not collapse: "Personally, I was not able to see it. I do not pretend to be wiser than my fellow-citizens but I realize that after every war there comes a depression". 

The 1923 Amendment Act set up District Committees to which the soldiers could apply for revaluation. Mr Wilford was pleased with the bill but he also wanted a real and substantial reduction to those in need, not just a partial reduction to give them a chance.

26. N.Z.P.D., 201 (8 August 1923), 627
27. N.Z.P.D., 201 (8 August 1923), 627
28. ibid., 635
The Government's plan was to revalue a little and see how the soldiers managed and revalue again and so on until a level was reached where they could cope. The Act also failed to provide for correcting bad subdivision. 29. Wilford argued, with more insight than Massey, that they should give the soldiers a real chance in order to bring about the right condition of mind towards the future.

The work of the Revaluation Committees soon confirmed that many mistakes had been made in the purchase of land. But the Government would allow no further investigation, even when discrepancies of thirty or fifty percent were found. The Opposition found it "extraordinary that even at the height of the boom, the Government should have been advised to buy land for soldier settlements the actual value of which was not half what was paid for it." But they could do no more than express the hope that the valuers who had made the awful blunders would not be working for the Government again. 30.

29. ibid., 644

30. N.Z.P.D., 204 (23 September 1924), 1053
Soldiers in the recently settled areas such as Taranaki, Hawkes Bay, Auckland and North Auckland were worst affected by the Depression of 1921-22. These soldiers had acquired land at the height of the boom and had had no chance to establish themselves. South Island settlement had passed its peak by 1920 and the slump did not have so much impact. The Inquiry Boards, however, showed that many of the soldiers had been in difficulty anyway because of over-priced land and other problems.

The Depression therefore was not as important in the Otago experience as it was for North Island farmers. Fewer settlers were in difficulty and only fifty percent of them were experiencing problems due to the slump. South Island settlement had begun early and slackened off fairly soon. Many of the more vulnerable soldiers had already left by 1921. Clifton and Benmore reflected this trend. Only five soldiers were left at Clifton in 1921 and these men had consolidated enough land to survive the slump.
There was a wider variety of problems in the South. Consequently, those still on their farms in 1921, having been able to survive the early problems, generally had enough resources to weather the Depression.

CONCLUSION

The scheme to settle soldiers on the land was a failure. The Government idealized rural life and failed to put enough thought into the potential problems and necessary details. Already inflated land values were pushed up, so many soldiers could not manage from the start, as at Clifton. The slump ruined many more settlers, especially in the North Island. Soldiers were also put on second rate and badly sub-divided land, as at Benmore. Despite the public outcry, the Government and Land Boards denied the problems for years. Yet, had the scheme been efficiently managed, the idea would have been a good one.

The Labour Government was very successful in settling soldiers on the land after World War Two. The scheme was carefully thought out and the soldiers were closely watched. The State Advances managed the soldiers' finances for them; they provided the stock and implements and paid the soldiers a small allowance to live on for the first few years.
The soldiers were also given courses at Lincoln and closely supervised on their farms. Consequently, the scheme was very successful.

The Massey Government failed to recognize the need for effective administration. They acted in the belief that giving a soldier a plot of land and some capital was sufficient - if the soldier worked hard enough, success would follow of its own accord. They tolerated numerous problems and failures because they did not relate them to their own lack of planning; rather it was due to some inadequacy on the part of the soldiers. The impractical idealism of the Government led to the failure of the scheme. Their limited concept of the role of Government meant that they lacked the desire to create an efficient system or to exert any control over the economy. Therefore, hundreds of soldiers lost everything they had put into their farms. The scheme that was intended to reward the country's heroes proved to be a disaster.
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(i) **Books - continued**


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(ii) Articles - continued

