**DISCHARGED SOLDIEBS SETTLEMENT ACT FURTHER AMENDMENT BILL 1922**

**House of Assembly, 6 December 1922, pages 2015-6**

Second reading

**The MINISTER of REPATRIATION (Hon. G. R. Laffer)** —The Parliamentary Drafts­man reports:—

In the course of the administration of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Acts the Minister of Repatriation has to sign or approve of innumerable applications, permits, leases, and agreements, and the volume of these administrative documents is growing daily. The work has already exceeded the capacity of one Minister, the mere task of affixing his signature taking up a very considerable portion of his time. To lighten his duties, the Government recently, in the reconstruction of the Ministry, created the portfolio of Assistant Minister of Repatriation, but upon the Crown Solicitor’s opinion being taken, they were advised that the Assistant Minister cannot validly execute any instrument or sign any document on behalf of the Minister of Repatriation. The effect is that the Minister of Repatriation himself still must continue to sign all documents and cannot delegate any of his functions to his Assistant Minister. It is to overcome this legal difficulty that the Bill is introduced. Clause 3 provides that all or any of the powers, duties, and functions of the Minister of Repatriation under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Acts may be exercised or discharged by the Assistant Minister of Repatriation concurrently with the Minister of Repatriation. This provision will enable the two Ministers to divide up the work between them, each performing specific functions as they may agree upon between them. The Assistant Minister will not be a delegate or agent of the other Minister; he will have as full a power and authority as the principal Minister of Repatriation, both as a Minister of the Crown and as a body corporate, and anything that the Minister of Repatriation can lawfully do the Assistant Minister will have power to do. In fact, the clause provides that the acts of the Assistant Minister are to be deemed to be the acts of the Minister of Repatriation. It need not be feared that this plenary power, possessed by both Ministers and exercisable by them concurrently, will lead to any friction in administration or inconsistency in policy. The two Ministers can subdivide their duties by consent, each operating, if desired, in separate spheres, and the smooth and proper administration of the Acts as between the two Ministers must always remain a matter for Cabinet control. No effective provision can be made for it in any legislative enactment.

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The Bill simply confers the same powers upon the Assistant Minister of Repatriation as those held by the Minister of Repatriation. The Assistant Minister was appointed to relieve me of some of my work. Later on, if I am called upon to administer the Irrigation Department, I intend to put in more of my time outside. One of the difficulties that has confronted me since I took office has been that I have been kept inside too much. It is my duty to know the work that is being carried out by the big departments under my control, and I cannot do that if I am chained to the office. I do not think there should be any objection to this simple amendment. The Lands, Soldier Settlement, and Irrigation Departments are so huge that it is beyond the capacity of one Minister to carry out the work satisfactorily unless he is thoroughly au fait with what is going on. The Assistant Minister has a good grip of repatriation work.

Mr. Price—We do not object to the Minister, it is the reconstruction of the Cabinet we do not like. Why were some portfolios transferred to the Council?

The MINISTER of REPATRIATION—The Leader of the Opposition has said that it would be a good arrangement to bring the Irrigation and Repatriation Departments under the control of one Minister. I move the second reading.

Mr. GUNN—I have no objection to this simple measure. If the Assistant Minister is to carry out the functions of his office he must have the same authority as the Minister of Repatriation. When the Government rearranged the portfolios, I said it would be a wise move to bring irrigation and repatriation under one head. I am glad to know that the rearrangement will mean that the Minister will be able to give more attention to outside work. It is essential that the Minister should keep in close touch with the enormous works being carried out along the Murray. A false move and a huge sum of public money may be wasted. It would be a good thing if members could view the operations of the Government along the river.

The Commissioner of Crown Lands—If any member or members desire to view the works along the Murray, I shall give instructions to my officers to facilitate them in every possible way. We have some Ford cars up there, and they would be placed at the convenience of the visiting members.

Mr. GUNN—I am pleased to hear that. Every member should have an opportunity to view the magnitude of the Government’s undertaking on the Murray River.

Mr. PRICE—Better results should be obtained by the co-ordination of the Irrigation and Repatriation Departments. When the Ministry was reconstructed certain portfolios should not have been removed from the Assembly to the Council. Those of Public Works and the Minister of Education should have remained in the Assembly. I support the Bill, and am glad it will give the Minister of Repatriation an opportunity to travel about and see the works that are being carried on by his departments.

Mr. McLACHLAN—With the assurance of the Minister I am quite prepared to support the Bill, but I should think that this rather an unique measure. I have never heard of two heads of one department. However, if the Minister is satisfied, and it will relieve him of work, I shall not oppose the Bill.

Bill read a second time and taken through remaining stages.