

# SOLDIER SETTLERS.

## DISSATISFACTION AT BILAMBIL.

### MANAGEMENT SEVERELY CRITICISED.

#### A BIG LIST OF GRIEVANCES.

Great dissatisfaction exists amongst the men on the Bilambil Soldiers' Settlement.

When a "Tweed Daily" reporter visited the locality on Tuesday for the purpose of viewing the progress of the work he was besieged by the landholders on the settlement and asked to give publicity to their many grievances through the "Tweed Daily," with a view to having them rectified.

A meeting of the men had been held for the purpose of hearing a lecture by Mr. Thos. Brooks on his bunchy top cure, and following this an impromptu meeting was held in the mess room to explain the complaints to the "Tweed Daily" representative. For three-quarters of an hour they poured out a story of delays, disappointments, and allegations of mismanagement, revealing a thorough disgust with the position of affairs at the settlement and the progress being made. The meeting was very lively, and at times an angry feeling was displayed, so incensed were the men at the treatment which they claim they are receiving.

#### QUESTION OF INTERNAL ROADS.

The President of the Bilambil Soldiers'

The President of the Bilambil Soldier Settlers' Progress Association (Mr. W. R. Soorley) was in the chair, and said that as a "Tweed Daily" representative was at the settlement it had been decided to place before the paper the grievances which the men felt they justly had, and so let the public know how they were being treated. The men now had an opportunity of explaining their troubles.

Mr. Ormsby said that the most vital matter was that of roads. They had been 15 months on the settlement and had done everything they possibly could to meet the wishes of the management, but it was now time something was done to look after their own interests. One of their men had gone to Sydney and, in company with the President of the Tweed Shire (Mr. Gerald Parker) had approached the Director of Soldier Settlements with a view to having the construction of the internal roads proceeded with. The Director promised to get into touch with the Shire Engineer and ask him, through the Shire Council, to give estimates, etc. Mr. Parker informed them the other day that as yet no such request had been made to the Shire Council, and until it arrived the Council could not move. Meanwhile the men were being put to great inconvenience through not having any access to their blocks.

#### **NO TIMBER AVAILABLE.**

Mr. W. Haydon said that crops of corn were now ready to harvest, but there were no sheds in which to put them. The timber was cut for some of the sheds but was held up at the mill until an architect in Sydney arrived at

until an architect in Sydney arrived at an estimate of the total amount of timber which would be required on the settlement. Until this arrived they could not use a stick of the timber. He had half a ton of pumpkins, but was unable to get them out for want of a road.

Mr. J. Orlov declared that they had been on the settlement 15 months, and there was no sign of a house being built. The timber had been taken from them and they had no say in it whatever. It had been said that they were to get it back at 25/ or 27/ per hundred, which was the same price the Sydney wholesale timber merchants were paying for local timber. Then they could not clear some of the blocks until the Department had drawn whatever timber it wanted off them. The manager had told them that this might possibly take two or three years.

Mr. T. Griffiths: The whole trouble is caused by poor management. (Hear, hear).

Another settler said that so far they had been living in tents and gunyahs, some of the men with their wives and families, and through the delays of the Department they would now have to spend another winter in these quarters. They had been promised packing sheds, but at the present time there was only sufficient timber for two or three. Through some dispute over the management, the mill had now been idle for about a week.

### **THE SUPPLY OF SUCKERS.**

Then there was the matter of suckers. Mr. Griffiths declared that the last of some suckers which had been on the

some suckers which had been on the South Murwillumbah wharf on December 20th, 1919, were only just received. They were in a disgraceful condition.

Mr. Darby: The trunks are in a decayed condition right down to the bulb and look like a rotten cabbage. You can poke your finger through the stem.

Mr. B. Robson: Are we going to be fooled about like this any more?

### **NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION.**

The Chairman, at this stage, proposed a vote of no-confidence in the manager, which was carried with loud applause.

Mr. Robson read an extract from the "Tweed Daily," referring to the action taken by the men at the Mount Gravatt Soldiers' Settlement in Queensland, where the removal of the manager within 24 hours was demanded.

By this time the men were thoroughly worked up, and talk swung back to the question of suckers. The men complained that the Department proposed to pool the price of the suckers and charge an average all round. Some of them had been fortunate enough to obtain suckers close to the settlement at 30/ per hundred, and these men would therefore be called on to help pay for the other suckers bought by the Department which had cost up to 43 per hundred. These men had been told by the manager that they would have to help pay for the Departmental suckers whether they used them or not.

### **OTHER COMPLAINTS.**

One man complained that he had been forced by the manager to plant a batch of suckers which had been rejected by another settler and that the

ected by another settler, and by the foreman. Also, the Department had purchased 14,000 pineapple plants, which the men were being forced to use and pay for whether they liked it or not.

Mr. W. Darby stated that soldier settlers were also supposed to receive grants of £625 each, but it had not been paid to them so far. The storekeepers could not be paid except out of what little money the men had themselves.

Complaint was also made of the insufficiency of the sustenance allowance. This was only 32/- per week for single men and £2/7/- per week for married men with families, which was totally inadequate.

#### **LETTERS NOT ANSWERED.**

Requests sent to the Department met with no response whatever, and letters were not even answered. Various inspectors and officials came along and took notes of the grievances, but nothing ever

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came out of it. A request had been made to have suckers in December: they were still arriving now.

"We are seriously considering direct action," said one man, "unless our grievances are attended to."

It was decided finally to send a wire to the Director of Soldier Settlements in Sydney, to visit the settlement as soon as possible.