

PREFACE

(i) The second annual report of the Rehabilitation Board is presented at a time when the armies of the United Nations are marching from victory to fresh victory. Each day sees Germany sinking further into defeat, while her Eastern partner, Japan, has been forced back on to a desperate defensive that will ultimately turn into the unconditional surrender for which the Allies are fighting. This is a time which we are justified in regarding as the "beginning of the end," and in this preface the Board appropriately desires to outline its interpretation of the objectives of rehabilitation, with full regard for the responsibilities entrusted to it under the Rehabilitation Act, 1941.

(ii) The Board considers that its immediate and basic responsibility is to give all ex-servicemen and ex-servicewomen the opportunity of returning to civil life on terms at least as favourable as those which would probably have applied, as a result of their own efforts, if they had not been required to serve in the Armed Forces.

(iii) If rehabilitation goes only thus far, none shall be placed at an economic disadvantage by his or her service—though it cannot be denied that physical and psychological sufferings and disabilities can never be entirely compensated for, or offset.

(iv) It may be said that this is a restricted interpretation of rehabilitation in the sense that it merely confirms the pre-war *status quo*, whereas the more farsighted leaders of the Allied Nations are thinking in terms of a new order that will enable the mass of the people in all countries to attain to progressively higher economic and cultural levels. The achievement of such a social order is a task of statesmanship in its widest sense, and if the Board succeeds in fully discharging its basic responsibility to ex-servicemen as defined it will consider that it has realized the primary objective of the Rehabilitation Act.

(v) Beyond its basic responsibility the Board recognizes a second responsibility, and one perhaps even more onerous of discharge. This is the responsibility of carrying out the Government's intention to reward, to the fullest possible extent, the meritorious service of men and women members of the Forces. In undertaking this responsibility the Board is mindful of the great difficulties in correlating merit with known or presumed hazard or with duration and zone of service. Nevertheless, it is the Board's practice, and intention for the future, to give the benefit of any reasonable doubt to the ex-serviceman in this respect.

(vi) Both responsibilities, although directly assumed by the Board, depend for their acquittal on the successful conversion of the New Zealand economy from a war to a peacetime one. This clearly can be effected only by the active support and co-operation of all sections of the community.

(vii) It is not the function of the Board to control the general economic environment. Its function is to operate within the conditions created by the war and the reconstruction to follow, with the object of providing a scheme of special treatment for the men and the women who, on land, sea, and in the air, have contributed so magnificently to the Allied cause.

(viii) In Appendix I of the report a brief outline of the system at present being operated in providing assistance is given. This interprets the present attitude of the Board to the question of priority and extent of assistance. As economic conditions and the various activities which go to make up national life return to normal this attitude will be subject to review from time to time.

(ix) The inevitability of observing some priority schedule is demonstrated by examples in most of the fields of rehabilitation assistance. The present housing shortage, for example, cannot be fully overcome until a full complement of labour is available in the timber-milling, construction, and allied industries and the normal inflow of imported builders' requirements is resumed.

(x) Similarly, until various materials and labour shortages are overcome, land-development, and therefore the establishment of ex-servicemen on farms, must proceed at a very reduced rate. It is interesting to note in this regard that both in South Africa and Canada a definite pronouncement has been made that no land-settlement will be undertaken until after the cessation of hostilities.

(xi) In different ways almost all of the other fields of rehabilitation activity are also affected by the exigencies of war—exigencies which must be expected to persist for some time after the war. It is in the light of these factors that the Board has found it necessary to proceed in the various ways and to the differing extents that are dealt with in the following sections of the report.