

1914.
NEW ZEALAND.

DEFENCE DEPARTMENT: ALTERNATIVE SERVICE FOR RELIGIOUS AND CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS TO MILITARY TRAINING

(RETURN RELATIVE TO).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Leave.

CIRCULAR LETTER ADDRESSED TO MAYORS AND CHAIRMEN OF COUNTY COUNCILS THROUGHOUT
THE DOMINION BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE.

DEAR SIR,—

Office of Minister of Defence, Wellington, 23rd March, 1914.

Conscientious and Religious Objectors to the Defence Scheme.

As you are doubtless aware, the Defence Act makes provision for the exemption from military service of those persons who satisfy a Magistrate that their religious principles would be violated by a performance of military duties. The advisability of providing similar exemption to those who on "conscientious" grounds seek to be relieved is now being considered.

In justice to those who in accordance with the Act carry out the prescribed military training, it is felt that some equivalent service of a non-military nature should be exacted from those who for religious or conscientious reasons cannot see their way to carry out their statutory military obligations. It is considered that it might be possible to employ those exempted on religious or conscientious grounds in work that might be of use to the community. The time spent on such work should be the equivalent of the military duties performed by members of the Territorial Force and Senior Cadets, and if in camp, pay and allowances should be given for an amount of work equivalent to that performed by those doing military duty when in camp. The General Regulations, from which the necessary extracts are appended, show the work for which it is sought to provide an equivalent.

At present the number of "religious objectors" is not considerable. There are only sixty-nine so exempted in the Dominion, but it is probable that when exemptions are extended to the "conscientious" objectors there will be an increase.

I should be most grateful if you could favour me with any suggestions on the following:—

- (1.) What nature of work would be most suitable in town or country? Would the local authorities provide work?
- (2.) What would be the most suitable method of supervising and recording the work done? Would the local authorities assist in the administration?
- (3.) Would it be possible to carry out the work as provided in Regulations 247 (excluding (d)) and 249 (excluding (c)) attached hereto? If not, how would you propose to allot the time for work?
- (4.) Any other points that may occur to you.

I feel sure that you will gladly second the efforts of the Government to equalize the duties of personal service in such a manner that all persons may, during the period for which they are liable to serve under the Defence Act, contribute a just share of work to their country without doing violence to their religious convictions or to their consciences.

Yours faithfully,

J. ALLEN,

Minister of Defence.

To all Mayors and Chairmen of County Councils on the 26th March, 1914.