

A considerable reduction in the strength of the Force has taken place. This is partly due to normal causes, such as retirement on superannuation, death, and dismissal, and partly to resignations, principally of single men, in order to join the Expeditionary Forces.

Owing to dearth of recruits the Police-training Depot at Wellington has been closed since last December. To fill vacancies in the Force advantage has had to be taken of section 32 of the War Legislation Amendment Act, 1916, and a number of temporary constables have been sworn in. It is not yet known to what extent this experiment will be satisfactory, nor how long it can be carried on, as most of the men offering for such service are untrained, and some are advanced in age, and those of military age will be subject to the operation of the ballot. It is evident that a critical condition will be reached if the regular Force suffers further depletion by the causes above stated. But I am glad to state that the temporary men appointed have so far generally given satisfaction.

It might be assumed that returned soldiers, on account of their training and discipline, would be suitable for appointment to the Police Force, but up to the present very few of them have made application for enrolment. This may be due to the fact that the majority of the returned soldiers are probably not physically fit for police duty, and that those who eventually do become fit for work either do not wish to join the Force, or obtain suitable employment in other occupations.

The necessity for providing adequate training-quarters for recruits after the war is evident. To bring the Force up to its full strength a much larger number of recruits than usual will require to be trained, and a longer period of training according to modern requirements will be desirable. Not only should attention be given to the general education of recruits who are backward in this respect, but an advance should be made to give technical instruction to all in certain subjects, such as shorthand and typewriting; photography, sketching, and draughtsmanship as applied to police work; chemistry relating to the identification and operation of poisons; professional lectures in law, physiology, and medical jurisprudence, &c. The value to the community of a well-trained and equipped Police Force is now better realized, and the expenditure of money in educating the men in the direction suggested to bring them to the highest point of efficiency would be of material benefit to the public and to the members of the Force themselves. Courses of special instruction might also be given with advantage to members of the Criminal Investigation Branch and sergeants at regular intervals, and also to a number of constables.

Under the War Regulations Amendment Act, 1916, power was given to make regulations relating to the liquor traffic. On the 21st August, 1916, regulations were made to prohibit treating in or about licensed premises, and to restrict women from resorting to such premises after 6 o'clock p.m. These regulations have been vigorously enforced. Police officers in charge of districts are almost unanimous in attributing the decrease of drunkenness chiefly to the operation of these regulations. No doubt the departure from the Dominion of such a large number of men with the Expeditionary Forces and for other purposes connected with the war has also been a factor in the reduction of the amount of drunkenness recorded.

Numerous complaints have been received at different times that the anti-treating regulations were disregarded, and from time to time special steps were taken to enforce the regulations, and many convictions have been recorded. Probably owing to the difficulty of detecting such offences, Magistrates have usually imposed heavy penalties, which no doubt have acted as a deterrent and greatly assisted the police in enforcing the regulations. There is reason to believe that many licensees, from a sense of loyalty and in sympathy with the spirit of the times, have faithfully observed the law, and it is certain that others flagrantly disregarded it, reckless of all considerations but their own interests. Considering the nature of the regulations, the extreme difficulty of detecting breaches, and the serious inroad upon the business income of licensees suddenly effected by the operation of anti-treating, a fair measure of compliance with the law has been achieved.

Later regulations were enacted enabling Licensing Committees to deal more effectively and promptly with badly conducted licensed houses. In only one instance have these regulations been invoked, but the Licensing Committee permitted a transfer of the license before the matter came on for hearing. The ground of the application did not relate to any breach of the licensing laws, but to a breach of a war regulation.

The summary powers given to the police by the regulations issued to suppress the illicit sale of liquor enabled them to act with greater promptness, and it can be said that such illicit traffic has now been practically effaced.

War regulations were also issued for the suppression of houses of ill fame, and these houses, by reason of the operation of the regulations, are now reported to be non-existent in the Dominion. The general desire of officers in charge of districts is that the provisions of these regulations may be enacted permanently as an amendment to the Police Offences Act.

Soon after the passing of the Military Service Act, 1916, an agitation began to develop against the operation of the Act, and disaffection threatened to hamper seriously the arrangements of the Government for sending transports away, and supplying provisions and other essential commodities for Imperial purposes in connection with the war. Proceedings were instituted under the War Regulations against a number of persons for having made seditious speeches, and in many instances terms of imprisonment were imposed on the offenders. The firm and consistent application of the War Regulations referred to eventually checked the movement. It is safe to say that but for this action a state of turmoil and upheaval such as this country has not yet experienced would have eventuated.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF DISTRICTS.

Extracts from the annual reports of officers in charge of districts are hereto annexed.

J. O'DONOVAN,
Commissioner of Police