

1917.

NEW ZEALAND.

DISCHARGED SOLDIERS' INFORMATION DEPARTMENT

(MEMORANDUM REGARDING THE ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS OF THE).

*Laid on the Table of the House of Representatives by Leave.*Discharged Soldiers' Information Department,
Wellington, 21st June, 1917.

In the memorandum which I had the honour of laying before the House at the commencement of last session I described the methods which had been adopted by the Department in dealing with the work entrusted to it and the measure of success which had attended its efforts up to that date. The experience gained during the year which has just elapsed has not rendered any material change of practice necessary, and the account which I gave of the Department's organization and methods applies almost in its entirety to present conditions. However, in the course of the visits which I have paid to different parts of the country during the recess in connection with the Department's business it has been brought home to me that a want of knowledge of the Department's functions and of what it has accomplished still subsists in some quarters, leading occasionally to misapprehensions and misunderstandings as to what is required and what is being done. I propose therefore, at the risk of some recapitulation, to describe in the present memorandum in brief form the special work which the Department has been created to perform, the organization which has been set up, and the methods by which the Department works; to indicate the changes and modifications which experience has led it to adopt; to narrate as succinctly as possible the results which have attended its efforts; and to outline the work which lies ahead, the increasing duties which the continuance of the war involves, and the magnitude of the task which will devolve upon the community in the way of the absorption in civil life of the thousands of soldiers returning to the Dominion on the conclusion of peace.

DUTIES OF VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS DEALING WITH SOLDIERS.

It will perhaps be convenient if in the first instance I set out the duties undertaken by the different Departments of State which deal with the soldier during the various stages of his career. The Defence Department has exclusive control of the men up to the time of discharge, and it also deals with war pensions and decides all questions in relation thereto. The Public Health Department undertakes the medical care of the soldier in the hospitals and convalescent homes, and arranges any curative treatment necessary to ameliorate his physical disabilities and improve his health. The Lands Department deals with the settlement of discharged soldiers on the land; and, lastly, the Discharged Soldiers' Information Department concerns itself with obtaining employment for the soldier after he has left the Forces, and generally with supplying him with any information of which he may stand in need. In connection with this latter branch of the work I may say that inquiries on various subjects are extremely numerous, and the men and their friends are manifesting an ever-increasing tendency to consult the Department regarding any matters in which they are in doubt.

COMMENCEMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT'S OPERATIONS.

The Department commenced operations on the 18th August, 1915. Under present conditions the men returned and returning to the Dominion consist practically of one class only—that is to say, soldiers invalided on account of sickness and wounds. Although all men who have made sacrifices in the service of their country in the present devastating war merit our highest gratitude and consideration, it will be admitted, I think, that next to those who have given life itself in the common cause come those who have returned to their native country in various degrees of disability due to mutilation and shock, or broken in health by disease and hardship. Later on, with the cessation of hostilities, the great majority of the men returning to our country will, we may hope, be blest with health and strength. When that time comes I hope it will be found that by private and public effort adequate means will have been provided for their reabsorption in the ordinary civil life of the community, but in the meantime many broken men are already with us, and have an overwhelming claim on our sympathy and help.