

by decentralizing control and administration as far as possible. The District Repatriation Boards and Local Committees constituted under the statute have therefore been given full executive powers. They have authority to deal with and decide applications made by discharged soldiers in their respective districts for assistance in any of the directions covered by the regulations. This policy of decentralized control has proved a gratifying success, and has enabled all cases to be disposed of with the utmost despatch. District Boards have been established at each of the four main centres, and Local Committees with offices and paid staffs have also been set up at the principal provincial towns. In addition, fifty-six honorary Repatriation Committees have been constituted throughout the Dominion. These bodies are composed of members representative of and nominated by such organizations as those of the returned soldiers, labour, and the industrial, commercial, patriotic, and social interests of the community, and they are carrying out their duties with enthusiasm and with a very sympathetic regard for the soldier applicants. Here again the Dominion has reason to be grateful to the citizens who are giving their services so freely in the all-important work of reabsorbing our Army into civil occupation. The local administrative staffs have been recruited exclusively from the ranks of the discharged soldiers themselves.

The assistance rendered by the Department to discharged soldiers may be classified under three main headings, as follows:—

Financial.—District Boards or Local Committees may grant loans up to £300 to enable soldiers to set up in business, and loans up to £50 for the purchase of furniture, tools of trade, or equipment. Loans in excess of £50 are subject to the approval of the Ministerial Board. No interest is charged on the first £50, or on any loan up to £50. In this category over three thousand six hundred applications have been approved between the middle of February and the 20th August, 1919, involving advances to the extent of over £380,000. From present indications the soldiers who have been established in business on their own account by this means are doing well, and are meeting their obligations in the matter of repayments, both of interest and instalments of principal, in a quite satisfactory manner.

Training.—Comprehensive arrangements have been made for the training of returned soldiers—(a) Whose disabilities render them unfitted to resume their pre-war occupations; (b) who enlisted at a comparatively early age and who are consequently not qualified tradesmen, also apprentices completing their indentures; (c) who desire to obtain farm-work or who may wish to take up land under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, but who have had no previous experience. At the present time over sixteen hundred men are being trained under the various schemes. All trainees are granted financial assistance by the Department in the form of sustenance or subsidies.

Employment.—The Department (including the original Discharged Soldiers Information Department) has up to date placed about nine thousand men in employment, and as the number at present receiving unemployment sustenance in the whole Dominion is only seventeen it will be seen that the unemployment situation is well in hand. The Department also pays transportation expenses of men proceeding to employment, and the medical fees of applicants for positions in the Public Service.

SOLDIERS' FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE BOARD.

During the year the Soldiers' Financial Assistance Board held 245 meetings and dealt with 11,652 applications, including 1,831 cases previously considered. Of this number, 2,150 were declined, 1,920 were withdrawn by the applicants, and 7,582 grants were authorized. Grants amounting to £163,601 were approved, and the sum of £137,445 was actually disbursed.

It was hoped that the Board's activities would cease soon after the signing of the Armistice, but, owing to the extension of the regulations permitting retrospective grants, large numbers of new applications, as well as applications previously declined through want of jurisdiction, are being received.

WAR RELIEF FUNDS.

Tables showing details of the administration of Patriotic Funds throughout the Dominion are now being prepared for presentation to Parliament.