

I understand that at the meeting of the Associated Chambers of Commerce of the British Empire to be held in Ottawa next August a resolution recommending Government to give effect to the resolutions of the Imperial Conference on Statistics will be passed. The *Times* in a leader in the issue of the 25th February said, with reference to the proposed Empire Statistical Bureau, that "Every one will realize the importance of this object. Never has it been more necessary that the public should be in possession of incontrovertible facts. In the process of reconstruction it is essential that the various portions of the British Empire should be enabled to play a part commensurate with their resources and potentialities. Yet little exact information is forthcoming concerning much of the King's vast domain. Cotton, medicine, health, and industrial efficiency, to name subjects now uppermost in the popular mind, to say nothing of many others, illustrate the abiding need for the most careful compilation and analysis of statistical returns. The projected Bureau may ultimately provide such a conspectus of the whole Empire as it is and as it might become, and may throw such a light on its commerce, agriculture, industry, and movement of population, as to become invaluable. . . . In Germany before the war the Statistical Bureau was ceaselessly employed in working on everything that might illuminate the future of the German people, and in the era which is now opening there can be little doubt that the nation which studies the drift of events as it is revealed by statistical analysis will be infinitely better equipped to take advantage of its opportunities than another which perhaps trusts only to the methods of empiricism. Business men, there is good authority for believing, are prepared not only to avail themselves of the services of such a Bureau as is suggested, but pay for them. No one who watched public events can doubt that Labour is already alive to the importance of statistical research."

It is estimated that the initial annual outlay for the maintenance of the Bureau will be about £30,000, to which New Zealand would be expected to contribute a proportionate share. On any basis of apportionment the annual contribution of New Zealand on a total expenditure of this amount would not exceed £1,000. I am of opinion that, apart from the importance to the Empire, the creation of a central Statistical Bureau such as is contemplated would be of great advantage to New Zealand, and I have no hesitation in recommending that the New Zealand Government should approve of and join with the other Governments of the Empire in giving effect to the resolution of the Conference for the establishment of a British Empire Statistical Bureau in London. Resolution No. 10 asks that if this scheme be approved by the various Governments of the Empire their representatives in London be appointed without delay, and I shall be glad if the matter can be dealt with immediately on receipt of this Report.

#### GENERAL STATISTICAL WORK.

*Functions of a Statistical Office.*—Resolution 11 sets out the unanimous view of the Conference as to the functions of a Statistical Office, and may be quoted in full:—

"The Conference desires to place on record its opinion that the functions of no Statistical Office can be exercised properly when limited to the initial work of collecting and compiling figures. The Conference is agreed that the prescription of so narrow a function has resulted in the past, on the one hand, in a tendency to an unintelligent massing of undigested statistical material, compiled at a considerable and other wasteful expenditure of labour and money, and, on the other hand, in a failure to render information which is of value readily available for public use.

"The Conference therefore accepts the view that a Statistical Office should include within its functions—

- "(a.) The presentation of the results of its compilations primarily in such a form as clearly to indicate their essential elements, with or without supplementary detailed information, which, though necessarily secured in the process of compilation, need not be published unless it serves a sufficiently useful purpose.
- "(b.) The utilization of the special knowledge and experience gained in the course of the work of tabulating the statistics, and the critical analysis of the results in such a way as to indicate most clearly their value and significance.
- "(c.) The elimination in every section of public statistics brought under review of those elements which, when properly examined, are found to serve no satisfactory purpose."

These emphasize to us the necessity of continuing and insisting on the policy already laid down for the staffing of the New Zealand Statistical Office—viz., that only properly qualified men should be appointed to the senior positions. It is only thus the Office can be placed in a position to carry out what the Conference regarded as the more important functions of a Statistical Office. The Conference considered that the mere arithmetical work involved in the collection and compiling of figures constituted only the preparatory and less important stage of the work of such an office, and emphasized the fact that "if this principle be ignored the more important services which thorough statistical work is capable of rendering to the community will be sacrificed."

Resolution 12 recommends that Statistical Offices when reporting the results of any inquiry should publish the more important *questionnaires* used in connection therewith, thereby providing a means whereby the value and significance of the tables can be adequately assessed. This point has generally been followed in New Zealand, and can be given more strict attention in future. It is also desirable that copies of all new forms of return and inquiry used should be sent to the Statistical Offices of the United Kingdom and self-governing Dominions.

Resolution 13 affirms that in all cases where a Government calls for statistics the necessary statutory authority should be provided. New Zealand has always had compulsory power for the collection of all statistical returns required by the Office, but the present Census and Statistics Act is not a satisfactory one, and a new Act should be obtained at the earliest opportunity. I am getting copies of the South African and Canadian Acts, which are of quite recent date, for consideration and guidance in framing a new Act for New Zealand on my return.

Resolutions 14 to 17 deal with statistics of colonies and protectorates, and do not therefore concern New Zealand.