

The advantage of the Common Fund system over the system of special investments has been strikingly manifested during the recent period of financial stringency. In common with other lending institutions, the Office has experienced difficulty in collecting some of the interest payable under its mortgages, but at the same time the regularity of payment of income to clients whose money is invested in the Common Fund of the Office has been maintained without interruption.

SYSTEM OF CONFERENCES OF PUBLIC TRUST OFFICERS.

6. Prior to the war it had been the practice to hold conferences of Head Officers and District Officers at suitable periods. Such conferences were held at Wellington, and were attended by District Officers, who came from the various districts of the Dominion. The system worked satisfactorily under the conditions which then prevailed. The principal administration work was at that time performed in the Head Office, so that officers could be withdrawn from the District Offices without inconvenience.

Since the close of the war the policy of decentralization, which had been inaugurated in 1913, has been actively followed until at the present time the bulk of the administration work connected with estates is performed in the District Offices. This has made it impracticable to withdraw a large number of District Officers at the one time to attend conferences held at a central point, such as Wellington.

After consideration, it has been decided to resume the system of conferences, but on a different plan. As it is no longer practicable to hold a central conference, it has been decided to inaugurate a series of conferences at the principal centres throughout the Dominion. The holding of such sectional conferences will avoid any dislocation of the work in the District Offices.

The first conference under the new system took place at Palmerston North, and lasted from the 26th February until the 1st March. The conference was attended by the Public Trustee, Assistant Public Trustee, and officers from the Head Office, while from the District Office staffs six District Public Trustees and eight District Managers were present. The District Inspector was also in attendance.

In order that the discussions might not be unnecessarily prolonged, copies of the agenda paper containing the matters for discussion were circulated prior to the conference to all officers concerned, in order that they might attend the conference prepared to set forth their views on the various matters clearly and concisely. The various classes of matters dealt with were introduced by a comprehensive statement by the management of the Office, or by one of the principal officers in the Head Office. A general discussion then took place, in the course of which a number of valuable suggestions were received. The discussion covered the organization of the Office, the systems in force to ensure the efficient conduct of the work, and also covered certain phases of the work of administering estates.

It was agreed by all officers who attended that the conference had been an unqualified success. It afforded an opportunity of placing before the District Officers the general policy of the Office on a number of important matters; it also enabled the visiting District Officers to exchange their views on various questions of organization; and the results attained will be most valuable in leading to further improvements in the Office methods and system.

The success which attended the conference amply justified the adoption of the scheme, and it is proposed that during the coming year further conferences shall be held at Dunedin, Christchurch, and Auckland. There is little doubt that the system of conferences will be a fixed feature of the Office control in the future. Now that the work is being carried on in the districts, it is essential that methods should be devised which will secure the standardization of the work in the various offices. This end is accomplished to some extent by periodical visits of Inspectors, but the results attained require to be supplemented by meetings of the District Officers and members of the Head Office staff.