

43. *Hon. Dr. Collins.*] From your experience do the bulk of these young fellows object to alternative service—those who are on Ripa Island?—All those who belong to that Christchurch Peace Society do, I think.

44. Is it not a fact that they were fairly willing to work until one particular man came there?—Yes, there were a lot who were willing to work, and I think I am correct in saying that they were persuaded not to work by others.

45. Was it not a man named Williams who practically organized the insubordination?—Yes; he is the man who, figuratively speaking, manufactures the bombs that others throw.

46. Would it be possible at all to separate these men who stir up the trouble—separate them from the others?—I think so. I think we have another place across on the mainland where we could put the well-disposed ones who were willing to work, and keep the others on Ripa Island.

47. From your experience of Ripa Island, practically there were only one or two who were the ringleaders?—Yes.

48. So that if they were separated from the rest there might be some chance?—Yes.

49. Did any of these men suggest that they would rather leave the country than serve?—I do not know.

50. They want to remain in New Zealand: they are willing to obey all the laws except this particular one?—Yes, except this one.

51. Have any of them ever suggested to you that if there were a portion of New Zealand to which they could be sent where they could be free of military service they would be willing to go?—No, I never heard anything of the sort.

52. Supposing a portion of New Zealand were set apart—say, a part of Sunday Island or Auckland Island—and they were sent there to colonize a place where they would not be troubled with military service, do you think that would appeal to them at all?—I doubt it. Life would be too uncomfortable; there would be no picture-shows—no amusements.

53. Do you think it would be better to have the whole matter put under the military authorities for them to deal with the whole system?—Of course, we could deal with them. It is largely a question of powers and staff. At present the people who are dealing with these prisoners at Ripa Island are men of the Royal New Zealand Artillery, who are withdrawn for the time being from their legitimate work. They are doing gaolers' work, which is not their proper duty. At Home in the military detention barracks there is a separate staff altogether for that purpose. Here the New Zealand Artillerymen are withdrawn from their proper work, and it adds a great deal to their labours.

54. Still, it is the military system we are considering, and is it not right that a military system and enforcement of service should be entirely in the hands of the military?—Quite so. I am merely pointing out that we have the system without any military powers to deal with these people, and therefore the work and the trouble that these Artillerymen are put to is out of all proportion to any good effect that comes of it, simply from the want of powers to deal with these prisoners and make things run smoothly.

55. If the powers were given to you, would you prefer them rather than having this divided authority—partly civil and partly military?—Yes, I would prefer to deal with them entirely or not at all.

56. You would prefer to deal with them rather than let them be under civil law at all?—No. I would sooner really, from a utilitarian point of view and from the point of view of the efficiency of the New Zealand Artillery, be clear of them altogether; I would far sooner not have anything to do with it.

57. Do you not think it ought to be under the military authorities?—Yes and No. It ought to be under the military authorities if we had the powers to deal with these people and if we had the staff to deal with them, otherwise we would rather not have anything to do with them.

58. That would be provided, I suppose?—There you come to the matter of expense.

59. There is expense either way?—Supposing the civil authorities took them over, you have already got your organization under the Justice Department.

60. But that brings the matter very much more out into the open as it were: it is not dealt with as a military offence?—Yes; it is not a military offence.

61. The question is whether it ought not to be made a military offence?—I do not quite see how you could. These young men go to Ripa Island because they break the civil law.

62. I grant that that is so now, but could not that be altered?—No, I do not think so, because a military offence in this country is an offence that is committed on parade or in camp when they are doing military work. Then, if they are insubordinate or misbehave like that they commit a military offence. But if they commit such an offence, we will say, as refusing to register, refusing to attend a parade, or refusing to take the oath—all those offences come under sections of the Defence Act and in that are civil offences. We do not deal with these young men until we actually have them under our hands on parade or in camp doing military work. People are apt to lose sight of this fact, that we here are not concerned in the young men obeying the sections of the Defence Act: we are not concerned in that—it has nothing to do with us at all. We know there are a lot of young men who are posted, we will say, to a certain unit—a regiment anywhere—and we know that these young men should turn up to parade or to drill on a certain day at a certain hour. The officer or the non-commissioned officer in charge calls the roll. There are a certain number of absentees. We do not go and pull those absentees up before the Magistrate. All we do is to report the matter. We simply say to the police, "Here are so many young men who ought to have been on parade and were not there. You deal with the matter." And the police deal with it. It is a civil offence. The police lay the information, and bring the young men before the Magistrate. All we are concerned in is to give evidence, if called on, to prove that the young men were absent from parade when they ought to have been there.