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## R.S.A. Annual Conference.

## INVERCARGILL DELEGATE'S REPORT.

Mr Chairman and Gentlemen.—In submitting the report of the Annual Conference, held in Wellington at the end of last month, I wish to stress the importance of unity among returned soldiers when dealing with all subjects of interest and importance, both from a national standpoint and from the standpoint of the returned soldier.

There are many things that the Association set itself out to accomplish in its early days that have been brought to a successful issue, and when reviewing the work of the past year, one cannot help but realise that at the back of it all, there has been that unity and comradeship which has built together, one of the strongest organisations, if not the strongest organisation that has ever existed in this country.

Our organisation is one that has a great future before it, for there are questions of vital importance that require careful consideration, and should in my opinion be taken up by the men who have helped to make and keep our country what it is.

Before actually touching upon the work done by Conference, I wish to refer to a district meeting, which was held in Dunedin, on 26th May. At this meeting a proposal was submitted to dispense with the services of the District Organiser, and to appoint a part-time secretary, at a retainer fee of £250 per annum, to attend to all the secretarial work in connection with the district. This proposal was eminently premature, as it would have been decidedly unwise to have made any alteration to the internal organisation of the district scheme until after the Conference, as then the district would be perfectly safe in re-arranging its internal organisation to fit in with whatever scheme was devised and approved of, by the Conference.

This matter then was left over until a future date, when it is hoped that the whole scheme of district organisation will be thoroughly revised and the best possible methods of organisation adopted.

The Annual Conference opened on the 29th May, 1920, there being present between 60 and 70 delegates from the whole of New Zealand.

In the early stages of the Conference the Dominion Executive was empowered to appoint those of its members, who were best fitted, to deal with each particular subject to form the nucleus of the different committees, and later in the day, open Conference appointed the remaining members to build up committees to deal with pensions, pay and allowances, medical, land, repatriation, organisation, finance and "Quick March," and for the sake of brevity, and so that these different subjects can be dealt with concisely and easily, I intend in my report, to deal with them under their separate headings.

## ORGANISATION.

The question of organisation is one that at present conferences has demanded a considerable amount of attention, and although at this conference there was not a demand for district autonomy, yet, it was felt that the districts should be given the amount of control necessary to allow them to organise their districts in the most effective manner.

The Organisation Committee, of which the speaker was a member first submitted an interim report, which if adopted would have done away with district control altogether, and the old scheme of organisation, that is the N.Z.R.S.A., and local associations would have been adopted again. This report was thrown out by Conference, and a new decentralisation scheme was adopted, the lines of which are as follows:—

(1)—That the basis of organisation shall be the N.Z.R.S.A. composed of affiliated and incorporated local associations.

(2)—That the four military districts as defined in the report of the Christchurch, page 3, be established as district for the purpose of organisation.

(3)—That the present district committees be authorised to call forth conferences of delegates from local associations.

(4)—That such conferences determine their own form of district organisation; annual conferences, voting power, executive and the like, provided always that the annual general meeting of the district conference shall be held in the month of May in each year.

(5)—Further districts may be established by the subdivision of existing districts provided that the districts affected buy such subdivided consent thereto, and that such subdivision is approved by the Dominion Executive, provided always that there shall

not at any time be more than six districts in the Dominion.

(6)—The funds of the district organisation shall be provided by means of capitation at the rate of an amount to be decided upon by district council per each financial member levied upon the local association comprising each district headquarters, capitation to be paid direct to headquarters and district capitation direct to district.

(7)—Each district conference shall forthwith establish groups of local associations within its district, provided always that the total membership of the local associations comprising any such group shall not be less than 400 financial members at the time when such group is established; provided further, that there shall not be in any district more than ten groups.

(8)—The objects of the district organisation shall be to promote welfare of returned soldiers within the limits prescribed by the objects, clauses 2 to 15 of the constitution of the N.Z.R.S.A., provided always that each district shall be subject to the control of the Dominion Council of the N.Z.R.S.A., and that a district conference or executive shall not have to determine lines of National Policy.

## DOMINION COUNCIL.

(1)—The council shall consist of delegates to be appointed to exercise voting powers as follows:—(a)—As to the number of delegates to the Dominion Council, each group having up to and including 1000 financial members as at 31st March preceding the Annual Conference, one delegate; each group having from 1,000 to 2,500 inclusive such financial members, two delegates; groups having over 2,500 members three delegates.

These delegates shall be elected by the delegates to the district conference and notice of their names and appointment shall be sent forthwith to the general secretary of the Dominion Council.

As to the number of votes for each district at Dominion Conference:—

Each district shall be entitled to one vote for every 400 financial members or part thereof comprised in the total financial membership of such district; financial membership to mean, members who are financial on the 31st March preceding the annual meetings of the Dominion Conference.

As to the distribution of votes among delegates:—

Every delegate shall have one vote and the balance of the votes to which any district is entitled shall be distributed among the delegates as the annual meeting of the district conference shall decide.

2.—The expenses of the delegates to the Dominion Council shall be paid by the N.Z.R.S.A. on the basis of £1 per day per delegate, and all locomotion expenses.

It was also decided that at least six weeks' notice of the Annual Conference should be given, and that associations should be given two weeks' notice in which to arrange for the forwarding of remits, and the agenda paper should be circulated to associations at least two weeks before the date of the Conference.

## FINANCE.

The finance committee in bringing forward their report for Conference to deal with had to consider an estimated amount of income on the one hand and an estimated expenditure on the other. As far as the expenditure is concerned this could be arrived at fairly easily and accurately, but it can be clearly understood that to arrive at an estimated income is a more difficult matter. However, the report submitted by this committee, which took the form of a statement of income and expenditure, showed the estimated number of new members, badge re-issue, and re-newal subscriptions for the current year. These were under-estimated to a fairly considerable extent, and the amount of capitation to be paid to headquarters was based on these figures.

It was therefore decided by Conference that the amount of capitation for new members shall be 3s, for renewals 2s, and the amount paid to headquarters for re-issues 3s. Provision has also been made for a refund from each of the districts at 2d per financial member, giving with the cash in hand an estimated total income of £3,899 16s 2d, while the expenditure which it must be remembered also provides for the expense of the delegates attending Annual Conference, is estimated to amount to £3,650 15s 11d.

## LANDS.

The question of lands is perhaps the one of most vital importance, not only to

the returned soldier, but from a national standpoint, and that being so, one cannot stress too fully the need of definite and decisive action when dealing with this vital question.

As everyone is aware a restriction has been placed on Section 2 of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act, which has caused and will continue to cause great hardships to a great number of our comrades, more especially those men who have been receiving medical treatment, and have not been able to avail themselves of the provisions of the Act.

During the sitting of the Conference a deputation waited upon the Prime Minister and the Minister of Lands in an endeavour to obtain something definite, in connection with the curtailment of Section 2 of this Act, but unfortunately both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Lands adopted a method of evasion, and the deputation was unable to obtain any satisfaction.

The following day, the Minister of Lands asked to be allowed to meet the Executive, which he did, and although every method was used by the Executive to nail him down to a definite statement regarding the special circumstances under which the Act would be administered, no result was obtained as he fell back on the Cabinet every time.

The following remits have been adopted by Conference:—

(a)—That the Government be urged to put into operation forthwith the clauses of the Act in force relating to the compulsory acquisition of land.

(b)—That where practicable the payment of the land so acquired should be made by Government securities (bonds, etc.).

(c)—That more stringent steps be taken to enforce the provisions of the Acts relating to the imposition of the graduated land tax with a view to forcing large land owners to place their properties on the market.

(d)—That the report of the Lands Committee as adopted by the Dominion Executive at its meeting in January last be adopted.

1.—That returned soldiers be exempt from land tax to the full extent of their mortgage to the Government. This remit was withdrawn as such holdings are already exempted.

2.—In the event of property being applied for on more than one occasion, during a period of six months, only the last valuation fee be retained by the Lands Department, the previous fees being refunded to the unsuccessful applicants.

3.—That the election of all members to represent Crown tenants on Land Boards be by secret ballots.

4.—(a) That the Government be called upon to provide money forthwith to enable all returned soldiers who have entered into contracts or taken options for the purchase of properties, to complete their engagements, as promised by the Prime Minister to a deputation from the Executive sub-committee on the 7th day of May, 1920.

(b)—That the Prime Minister be called upon to redeem the promise made by him to the last Conference, that the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act will remain in operation until every returned soldier has been settled on the land.

5.—That the Government be urged to grant discretionary power to Land Boards to grant applications for sale after the expiry of five years.

6.—That the Government be urged in land ballots to give preference to men who have proceeded overseas, as against those who have not.

7.—That the delay on the part of the Government Lands Department in settling the liabilities of soldier settlers to private firms is detrimental to the soldier's interest, and recommends that a more expeditious method in dealing with these accounts shall be adopted.

(Continued on page 4.)

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