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THE Fourth Session of the Seventeenth Parliament of New Zealand was this day opened by the Governor, when His Excellency was pleased to make the following

S P E E C H .

HONOURABLE GENTLEMEN OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, AND GENTLEMEN OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.—

It affords me much pleasure to again meet you in Parliament assembled.

During the recess I have visited most of the larger centres of the Dominion and several of the outlying districts, and have made myself acquainted with the people. My preconceptions regarding their loyalty to the Throne and their devotion to our most gracious Sovereign have been amply confirmed. This greatly enhanced the pleasure of my visits, and was most gratifying to me as the representative of His Majesty and also personally.

The Coronation of His Most Gracious Majesty King George V took place on the 22nd June with befitting ceremony, and the loyalty and enthusiasm displayed, not only in Great Britain and Ireland, but also throughout His Majesty's vast dominions, show that his subjects far and wide regard him as no unworthy successor to his noble father, and that it is with infinite trust they leave in his hands the onerous and arduous task of guiding the destinies of Empire through all the difficulties and complications of domestic and international affairs. Congratulations were sent to His Majesty from the Government and the people of New Zealand, and addresses were sent from the women of the Dominion and the Maori population. These were most graciously received and acknowledged. To the people of New Zealand, in common with those of the other oversea Dominions, the ceremony was of unprecedented interest in view of the fact that His Majesty, as Duke of Cornwall and York, was the first of his illustrious line to visit every portion of the Empire.

An Imperial Conference of the Prime Ministers of the oversea Dominions and the representatives of the British Cabinet was summoned to meet in London. This Conference was attended by my Prime Minister and the Attorney-General. The results of that Conference have been most satisfactory, and the details of its proceedings will be placed before you.

The claim made by the Government of the United States of America against the Imperial Government, known as the Webster Claim, has received careful attention by the Prime Minister and the Attorney-General. Your representatives had several conferences with the British Embassy in America, and also with the Home Government in London, which have resulted in an arrangement between the Home Government and the Government of this country which they consider completely satisfactory to the interests of New Zealand.

During the last twelve months death has removed the Hon. William Cowper Smith, of the Legislative Council, a gentleman who had earned for himself the esteem and respect of both branches of the Legislature.

I am glad to be able to congratulate you on the continued prosperity of the Dominion and on the increase in the material well-being of the people, as evidenced by the returns and the reports of the State services. The condition of the people generally is much improved, contentment and happiness obtain everywhere, and the outlook for our producers and for those engaged in manufacture, trade, and commerce is encouraging.

The farming industry, equally with the other industries of New Zealand, continues to develop not only rapidly, but on a firmer basis than in the past; for although live-stock products still form the great bulk of our exports, and wool easily maintains its position as the most valuable of these, yet the Dominion is by no means so dependent as formerly upon the price of any one staple. The closer settlement of extensive tracts of country once grazed in large areas is now reflected not only in the increased value, but also in the greater diversity of our exports of farm-produce, the most noticeable features in this healthy change being the increases in the production of lamb, butter, and cheese. Having in view the conditions of the world's markets for the commodities that New Zealand exports, and also the probable effect of the competition of other countries, my Advisers consider there is every reason to expect a continuance, or even an augmentation, of the prosperity which has lately characterized the trade and industry of the Dominion.

During the past year my Advisers have continued the work of assisting the settlement of the country by steadily pursuing the construction of railways, roads, and bridges in various parts of the Dominion under the authorities granted by Parliament.

The means of communication in districts more remote from the principal settlements have been appreciably improved by the formation and extension of roads and tracks. More progress might have been made in this direction but for the fact that during last year the labour which was expected to be available for roadworks during the summer was to a larger extent than usual absorbed in other industrial pursuits, and was not obtainable during the months most favourable for work in the backblocks.

The professional gentleman selected by my Advisers to act as Chief Electrical Engineer in connection with the development of hydro-electric power has arrived in the Dominion, and has entered upon his duties with an energy and enthusiasm which encourages the hope that the first large scheme to be undertaken will, within a reasonable period, be in successful operation. Much valuable investigation in connection with this undertaking has been accomplished by the Assistant Electrical Engineer, who was in charge for a short time pending the arrival of the principal Electrical Engineer from England.

The survey-work in connection with the important scheme for the irrigation of a large area of suitable land in the Ida Valley, Central Otago, has been completed, and my Responsible Advisers are now in a position to enter into contracts for the supply of water to the landowners, in accordance with the provisions of the authorizing legislation passed during last session of Parliament. The Last Chance Water-race, originally constructed and used for many years in connection with mining operations, has been acquired by the Government on favourable terms, and it is proposed to utilize the race as a source of supply for the irrigation of considerable areas of land at Bald Hill, Earnsclough Flat, and the intervening country.

Other irrigation schemes presenting favourable features are receiving careful attention.

The output of gold and silver from our mines shows a slight decline, but this is more than compensated for by the increase in the output of coal, which for the first time has reached over two million tons.

The mining industry produced minerals during the year to the total value of over three and three-quarter millions sterling, and since the commencement of mining within the Dominion wealth to the value of over one hundred and eleven millions has been won.

In regard to the labour-market, I am informed that the outlook for the immediate future is very promising indeed. Although we are well into the winter the applications for employment at the various bureaux of labour have been fewer than for many years past.

Great interest has been taken in the Workers' Dwellings Act passed last session, under which workers in any part of New Zealand are now enabled to

apply for the purchase of residences on payment of a small deposit of £10, the balance being payable in easy instalments covering twenty-five years and a half. In response to the large number of applications received, arrangements have already been completed for the erection of a number of dwellings.

To ascertain whether a scheme for insurance against unemployment should be adopted in New Zealand, inquiries are being made into the various schemes formulated by Great Britain and other countries of Europe, and the intention of the Government will be announced to you later.

In pursuance of the recommendations of Lord Kitchener and in accordance with the general scheme of defence, a Commander of the Defence Forces has been appointed, and my Advisers have been fortunate in securing the services of so eminent a military expert as Major-General Godley.

I am glad to be able to announce that, under the new system of universal training brought into operation by the Defence Acts, youths between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one have been registered, and are now being medically examined for service in the Senior Cadets and Territorial Forces of the Dominion. The results of registration have been satisfactory, and the spirit in which this call on the patriotism and sense of duty of the people has been met is highly commendable.

The youths registered will be posted to various units of the Forces, and it is confidently expected that the scheme adopted for the training, clothing, and equipping of the new Force thus brought into existence for the defence of the Dominion will very shortly be in full working-order. Apart from the military aspect of the movement, and even if our men are never required to arm in defence of their country, the physical training of our youths should produce a marked improvement in the discipline, efficiency, and physique of the citizens of New Zealand.

The first of the training-camps under the new scheme was established at Tauherenikau, and proved most successful. In connection with this a report by the Director of Military Training will be duly placed before you as an appendix to the annual report of the General Officer Commanding.

I am happy to congratulate you upon the launching of the Dreadnought "New Zealand," which took place at Glasgow on the first day of this month in the presence of a very large number of spectators.

The revision of the existing prison system is progressing steadily, and a Prisons' Board has been set up under the legislation of last session. A report of the operations of the Board will be furnished in due course.

My Advisers have completed arrangements on satisfactory terms for the establishment of a mail-service between New Zealand and Canada *via* Fiji and Hawaii. The service from New Zealand will commence on the 4th August next, and from Canada on the 6th September.

The result of the last census is most gratifying, the population having increased to over one million, exclusive of Maoris. The Maori population shows an increase of over two thousand.

Exclusive of Maoris, the increase since the census of 1906 is 119,829. The estimated population to the 31st March, 1911, was 1,006,757, a difference of only 1,650 from the census population of two days later, which must be considered as a very close estimate. The estimated increase by births during the five years since 1906 was 80,567, and the increase by immigration 36,712. The arrivals in the Dominion have been largely in excess of the departures.

The Representation Commission to delimit the boundaries of the electorates on the basis of the population statistics revealed by the census is sitting, and the result of its labours will be duly placed before you.

My Ministers have continued their policy of granting assistance towards the payment of passages of farm labourers and domestic workers from the United Kingdom, and during the year the number of persons thus assisted amounted to 2,624. By arrangements made with the shipping companies trading to the Dominion, young women domestic workers were enabled to obtain passages at a much-reduced rate, and included in the number mentioned above there are 831 of these workers.

The demand for land for closer settlement still continues, and under the Land for Settlements Act every endeavour is being made to acquire land for this purpose. The areas, however, that are suitable and that can be secured at a reasonable price are becoming restricted. On the other hand, under the Land Settlement Finance Act very satisfactory progress is being made, and as time goes on it is expected that the provisions of this Act will be more largely taken advantage of.

The general benefit arising from recent legislation affecting Native lands is now being felt. In all parts of the Dominion the Natives show a strong desire to bring themselves into touch with closer settlement. They are using the machinery of the Native Land Court and Boards freely for the adjustment of their titles and the disposal of their lands. The Native Land Purchase Board has acquired a considerable area of land, which will be further augmented as soon as the necessary surveys and valuations now being pushed on vigorously are completed.

The recent conference of hospital authorities, and the tone of the discussions on the various important problems with which the Hospital Boards are confronted, show that they are very much alive to the need for a general extension of our hospital system—in the direction of the prevention as well as the cure of disease. The decisions arrived at by the conference were based on an intimate knowledge of the needs of the Dominion, and my Advisers are giving them careful consideration.

The Commission appointed under the Gaming Amendment Act of last session, the Commission appointed to inquire into the route of the North Auckland Main Trunk Railway, and the Commission appointed under the Kaiapoi Reserve Act have concluded their inquiries and submitted their reports. These will be placed before you in due course.

MR. SPEAKER AND GENTLEMEN OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,—

The estimates of the revenue and expenditure for the year will be placed before you. They have been prepared with due regard to economy consistent with efficiency. The revenue for the past year exceeded the estimate, and shows an increase upon that for the previous financial year. I am therefore pleased to say that the year's transactions have resulted in a substantial surplus.

The post-audit system has been introduced and is working smoothly and satisfactorily, and is decidedly conducive to prompt payment.

The National Provident Fund Act of last session is now in operation, placing within easy reach of our people the means of lightening the burdens of maternity, as well as protecting the young family and ensuring independence in old age.

HONOURABLE GENTLEMEN OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, AND GENTLEMEN OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:—

For some considerable time no substantial amendment has been made in the law relating to persons of unsound mind, and legislation dealing with mentally defective persons needing oversight, care, and control will be submitted to you.

A Bill amending the Native Land Act, 1909, will be submitted for your consideration. It will deal with various matters that have been noted in practice during the period since the Act came into operation.

Bills effecting an improvement in the existing law will be submitted to you in respect to Workers' Compensation, Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration, and Wages Protection.

A measure dealing with the important question of town-planning will be submitted for your consideration.

The question of the eradication of noxious weeds has become one of vital importance. Something may be done to minimize the evil by regulating the sale of seeds, and a Bill dealing with the matter will be introduced.

The Administration Act, the Births and Deaths Registration Act, the Marriage Act, the Pharmacy Act, the Shipping and Seamen Acts, and the Mining Act require amendment in many important details, and measures for that purpose will be submitted for your consideration.

Bills will also be introduced dealing with Loans to Local Bodies, Local Government, Patents, Designs, and Trade-marks, the Registration of Plumbers, the Sale of Poisons, and other important matters.

In view of the lengthy session of last year and the large amount of important legislation which was then passed, my Advisers are of opinion that this session may be a comparatively short one, in order that the general election may be completed as early as possible.

Commending the proposals of my Ministers to your earnest attention, I pray that, with the blessing of Almighty God, the results of your labours may be for the good of the Empire and of lasting benefit to the people of New Zealand.