

1926.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

REPORT

OF

ROYAL COMMISSION

APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO AND REPORT UPON

WAR RELIEF FUNDS.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by His Excellency's Command.

[THIRD SESSION OF THE TWELFTH PARLIAMENT.]

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REPORT OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON WAR RELIEF FUNDS.

To His Excellency Sir Francis Alexander Newdegate, Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George, Governor in and over the State of Western Australia and its Dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia.

YOUR EXCELLENCY,

The Royal Commission on War Relief Funds was issued by Your Excellency on the 20th September, 1922, and empowered your Commission to inquire into and report upon the amounts of funds collected by various bodies and organisations during the late war, for the purpose of assisting soldiers and their dependants within the State, and as to the disposal of the surplus funds, if any, held by the various bodies and organisations since the declaration of peace; with the object of consolidating all the funds of the various bodies and organisations into one common fund; and to the intent that such funds may be placed under the control of three trustees, one to be appointed by the Returned Soldiers' League, one by the combined bodies or organisations, and one by the Government.

The first sitting was held on the 10th November, and after holding seven sittings and taking evidence, your Commission adjourned on 5th December, 1922, and resumed taking evidence on the 10th July of this year.

Your Commission has held 56 sittings, visited 21 centres outside the metropolis, examined 106 witnesses and received definite information of 110 separate funds still in existence.

This State is to be congratulated on the generous support accorded by its residents to the many funds inaugurated for the benefit of the West Australian soldiers of the Australian Imperial Forces and their dependants in necessitous circumstances. No less a sum than a million and a quarter sterling was raised.

We express our deep appreciation to the many hundreds of willing men and women workers in "Charity's Noble Cause." Fully 98 per cent. of these workers gave their time and energy without remuneration, and in many cases spent their own money in furtherance of their laudable efforts.

The funds collected were of material assistance to our soldiers and their dependants, but your Commission view with indignation the refusal of the Federal Treasury to augment the Western Australian funds in contradistinction to the grants they made to the Eastern States, as *vide* the following extract from Federal "Hansard" of 24th July, 1923:—

WAR PATRIOTIC FUNDS.

Commonwealth Subsidy.

Mr. KILLEN (for Mr. Mann) asked the Prime Minister, upon notice—

1. Is it correct that the war patriotic funds and relief funds in the Eastern States of the Commonwealth have been materially subsidised by the Commonwealth Government?

2. Is it correct that similar funds in Western Australia have been refused any such assistance?

3. Will he undertake to afford similar assistance in all States, and make good to the Western Australian funds what they have lost in this respect?

Mr. BRUCE: The answers to the honourable member's questions are as follow:—

1. During the financial years 1918-19 and 1919-20 the following contributions were made by the Commonwealth:—Lord Mayor's Patriotic Fund, Sydney, £42,930; Australian Patriotic Fund, Melbourne, £85,459.

2. No. In response to a communication from the Commonwealth asking for advice as to the amount required to replenish the patriotic fund in that State, the Premier of Western Australia replied, on 8th July, 1919, that it was the hope of the executive that the need to call on Commonwealth funds to supplement the efforts of the residents of Western Australia would not arise. No further communication has been received from the Premier on the matter.

3. There is no record of any assistance having been asked for by other States. Furthermore, it is understood that such funds have been closed for some time.

Answer No. 1 contradicts Mr. Crawcour's statement, and shows that the grants made by the Commonwealth provided the recipients in the East with a better allowance per week than was received by the people here.

Answer No. 3 does not coincide with the evidence tendered to your Commission by Mr. Crawcour, Secretary of the War Patriotic Fund of Western Australia. He says:—

Senator Millen said at the 1917 conference "that if the funds ran out, the Commonwealth would not be found wanting." When I returned here I wrote to Senator Millen and asked what Senator Millen meant. Senator Millen replied that the Commonwealth would not subsidise the fund.

Considerable divergence of opinion exists between your Commission and some organisations as to the manner in which they were entitled to distribute or spend the money they received from public appeals. Their seeking of legal advice to protect them from questions put by your Commission when making investigations into their commercial methods is, to say the least of it, not conducive to a feeling that they are willing to allow the light of day to illumine the distribution of the money they received in the name of "patriotic help given."

The Western Australian Division of the Red Cross Society are to be highly commended for the admirable work they have done, although slight exception might be taken to their spending of £16,000 on the Kalamunda Convalescent Home. Your Commission is decidedly of the opinion that this expense should have been borne by the Federal Government, and that the £16,000 in question should now be refunded and devoted to alleviating the hardships of the returned A.I.F. soldiers and their dependants in Western Australia.

Strong exception is taken by your Commission to the attitude of the Y.M.C.A. in regard to War Relief Funds. It was stated in evidence by their officials that a sum of £79,140 was collected in 1919 from an appeal made to the public, to help them in war work,

and that out of this an amount of £31,260 was forwarded to the central office in Melbourne. They now say, in effect, that so far as the W.A. Branch of the Y.M.C.A. is concerned, the matter ends there. Further, they promised that they would supply your Commission with data and published press and other reports in connection with their funds under review, but so far they have neglected to do so. In the opinion of your Commission their line of reasoning is suggestive of evasion. The sum of £849 15s. 2d., obtained by the Y.M.C.A. from the sale of the Blackboy Hut, should be entirely devoted to future relief of needy cases in connection with soldiers of the A.I.F. of 1914-1918. The letter received by the Y.M.C.A. from the Minister for Defence, dated 17th April, 1920, approving of the Hut money (which was subscribed by the people of Western Australia) being "put in a Trust Fund for the future Naval and Military work of the Association for service to the Commonwealth Naval and Military Forces" savours of audacity and impertinence.

The following interesting statement was made to your Commission by Mr. A. D. Stone, who was a prisoner of war in Germany and Russia:—

"Parcels came from the Church Army and from the Salvation Army, and they were very good; as a matter of fact, but for the Red Cross, many of us would not now be alive. So far as the Y.M.C.A. were concerned, I never saw a pencil or a piece of note paper from them. A statement has been made that the Y.M.C.A. paid £10,000 to the prisoners of war. I never saw anything of that."

This is borne out by a statement forwarded to your Commission by Mr. E. R. Peacock, an erstwhile prominent official of the Y.M.C.A., who, in a pamphlet published by him, now challenges their methods. He says:—

"£10,000 was given to the International Committee of the Y.M.C.A. of New York. The Americans did not use or want our £10,000 and so ultimately it was returned, but under a different heading. I saw the Americans who had been engaged in the prisoners' of war work and they told me that they had not been able to do anything to speak of for our Australians. At any rate, in the balance sheet of the Australian Y.M.C.A. appears an item of more than £10,000 as a contribution from the International Committee of the Y.M.C.A. of North America. *There is no question this is war money.*"

The evidence of the returned A.I.F. soldiers gives the direct impression that the soldiers considered that they paid for everything they received from the Y.M.C.A., except writing material.

The pooling of the now available funds in the State does not meet with the approval of your Commission.

The splendid example set by such centres as Beverley, Katanning, etc., in having business propositions managed efficiently by patriotic men and women, and earning money regularly for war relief purposes, is to be commended. The pooling of the funds would leave these people no incentive to carry on their good work.

Where there are two or more funds under separate management in one centre, it is desirable that one executive should be in control.

There are a number of funds in existence, some of which have been lying in banks for years earning no interest. In many cases some of the trustees have left the district, and your Commission believes that the public would welcome intervention.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

Your Commissioners recommend:—

1. That where there is only one War Relief Fund in a city, town or district, such fund should be operated upon only for the relief of necessitous cases of members of the A.I.F. or their dependants, and that the committee controlling the funds should be nominated by the residents of such centre, provided, however, that when available, the branch of the Returned Soldiers' League in the district should have representation on such committee.

2. That where there are two or more War Relief Funds in any centre, these shall be amalgamated and controlled by the committee mentioned in recommendation No. 1. This provision is necessary to prevent overlapping in relief given, and in expenses that may be incurred in management and administration.

3. That the Defence Department be approached by the State Government with a view to releasing the Y.M.C.A. from the obligation contained in their suggestive letter of 17th April, 1920, as to the disposal of surplus moneys received from the sale of the Blackboy Hut, and further, *that the Y.M.C.A. use such money solely for the relief of returned members of the A.I.F., 1914-18, or their dependants.*

4. That the Government take steps to appoint three trustees; one to be nominated by the Government, one by the central executive of the Returned Soldiers' League, and one by the Ugly Men's Voluntary Workers' Association, to take charge of all unclaimed and unused moneys now lying in banks and which were collected for war relief purposes, and that such trustees shall have full power to disburse these moneys amongst the War Relief Committee of the districts in which the amounts were collected.

5. That the Government request the Western Australian Federal members to move in the matter of ascertaining whether the Y.M.C.A. has any right to retain for other than war relief purposes the whole or any portion of the £10,000 which was forwarded to America for the relief of prisoners of war in Germany, which money was afterwards returned to the Y.M.C.A. in Melbourne.

We have, etc.,

J. S. DENTON,

Chairman.

W. RICHARDSON,

A. A. WILSON,

Members.

BAILEY WATSON,

Secretary.

27th November, 1923.