

NEW TOWN HALL-

NO

Says The Minister

THANKS

Says Mr. Gordon Palmer

Christchurch Times March 10, 1961



Mr. R. W. Arnold with the "Book of 7,567 signatures."

THE tremendous amount of work put in by the central organiser (Mr. R. W. Arnold) the area organisers and the army of canvassers on the borough-wide petition against the proposed new Town Hall was not in vain.

The Minister's "No" to the £200,000 scheme has made every moment of their strenuous and thankless task—undertaken during some of the worst weather of the year—very worth-while. It will be recalled that it was Mr. W. Gordon Palmer, that alert and forthright Highcliffe citizen, who first mooted the idea of a protest meeting from which stemmed the petition.

Following the announcement of the Minister's decision, Mr. Palmer gave the following statement to the Christchurch Times:—

"The ratepayers of Christchurch are to be congratulated upon the victory achieved by their united effort to resist the Town Council's proposal for the building of a new Town Hall.

"The Minister of Housing and Local Government has given an emphatic "No" to the proposal, stating that the erection of a new Town Hall was premature in view of the forthcoming adjustment of the boundaries now being considered by the Boundaries Commission.

The protest campaign first started in the columns of the Christchurch Times where I suggested a protest meeting following the Town Council's July meeting. In conjunction with my main supporters, the then Coun. John Smith, S. J. Watson, R. W. Arnold, Group Capt. S. C. George and A. White, we decided to hold a protest meeting which gave us overwhelming support.

"It was there suggested to follow up with a petition, confined exclusively to the ratepayers of Christchurch. This was undertaken effectively by R. W. Arnold, with the support of over 150 canvassers, and their efforts were crowned with the astonishing result that three quarters of the ratepayers signed the petition.

"Our M.P., Mr. John Cordle, kindly undertook to present the petition personally to the Minister but of course he expressed no personal view one side or the other.

"I have been so overwhelmed with letters that it is only possible to thank all helpers through the columns of the Christchurch Times. We must also thank the ladies and gentlemen of the press for their unfailing support and also for the dozen or more television and radio broadcasts.

"May I urge all our supporters to bear no animosity against Ald. J. W. Richardson and others who are naturally bound to support their committee and I trust that all will be forgotten.

"We had proposed to hold a victory meeting at the Town Hall, but the chairman of the Christchurch Ratepayers' Association (R. W. Arnold) suggested we should combine with the association's meeting in the large hall at the Town Hall at 7.15 p.m. on March 20.

"At that meeting we shall not only thank our supporters, but urge all voters to record a vote at the forthcoming Municipal Elections in May which is their bounden duty as citizens.

"We have no pride in the achievement, but naturally feel humbly thankful that the Council has been reminded to check the extravagance in the expenditure of public monies. They have already agreed to modify the cost of the new swimming pool, and I am perfectly sure they will take the Minister's rebuff with the same good grace that we should have displayed if the verdict had gone against us." The Minister's decision brought the following statement from Mr. R. W. Arnold: "A very welcome decision that firmly puts the brake on run-away schemes for overspending local rate revenue and building up heavy municipal debts.

"I would not claim the petition alone produced this decision, but by its timing it certainly allowed the Minister to include consideration of it within other factors leading to his decision.

"It has been said we jumped the gun in organising a petition when we did. The text of the Minister's decision very satisfactorily underlines that jumping the gun was on the Council side in seeking powers to purchase land, raise loans, and plan the scheme generally before we know the pattern of future local government administration in this area.

"The objective here was of course to present the Boundary Commission with Government approval to develop such a scheme as additional evidence supporting a case for keeping Christchurch a separate local government authority, since it would have shown de facto Ministerial support in giving prior sanction to such a costly and ambitious scheme.

"My colleagues, W. Gordon Palmer and S. J. Watson, will join me in saying how satisfied we are at finding the Minister was aware of that possibility and quite properly avoided it."