

PUBLIC WORKS STATEMENT

(BY THE HON. R. SEMPLE, MINISTER OF WORKS)

MR. SPEAKER,—

In accordance with the provisions of section 8 of the Public Works Act, 1928, I submit my report on works carried out during the year ended 31st March, 1943, together with a statement of expenditure certified by the Controller and Auditor-General.

My resumption of the portfolio of Public Works during the year under review was in consequence of the death of my colleague, the late Hon. H. T. Armstrong, whose passing is deeply regretted. His term of office was characterized by the added strain of circumstances arising from war conditions, and the loss of his personal qualities as a Minister is much to be deplored.

As was the case in the preceding year, normal public-works activities have been practically suspended on account of war conditions, and only works of special national importance have been carried out. A general review of such works will be found later in this Statement and in the Appendices hereto.

The resources of the Department as regards both men and material have been devoted to the prosecution of construction works required for the armed Services. Honourable members are aware of the substantial demands which have had to be met in this connection by reason of the circumstances which altered the national situation in New Zealand following the declaration of war against Japan. The obligations, which this Dominion is privileged to share, in relation to hostilities in the Southern Pacific area have necessitated an expansion of constructional activities of all kinds in order to meet the requirements of our own forces and of our Allies.

The Public Works Statement which was submitted to this House last year made reference to the constituting of a Defence Construction Council and to the appointment of a Commissioner of Defence Construction. The justification of this action has been demonstrated by the acceleration in the completion of all classes of buildings and services, which had to be provided with the utmost expedition for the Allied Services in New Zealand and certain Pacific locations.

The determination of priorities and the co-ordination of construction organizations, including those directed by private enterprise as well as of Government Departments, were administered under the Commissioner for the urgent completion of numerous works, with very satisfactory results.

In order to establish more appropriate control over the execution of all construction works, including housing construction, legislative measures were recently placed before this House in the form of the Ministry of Works Bill, and these were agreed to by honourable members.

The Council appointed last year in terms of the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Act, 1941, has been meeting regularly, and is pursuing its investigations with a view to determining broad questions of policy which can be implemented in the future. It is anticipated that during the ensuing year it will be possible to constitute a number of catchment areas as a preliminary step towards the election of Catchment Boards for these districts as provided for in the Act.

The Council has already made contact with a number of local authorities, and in addition to discussing general matters from the viewpoint of the special legislation, has also conferred regarding the particular river and soil-conservation problems in the respective districts. I am pleased to report that the attitude of the local authorities which have been approached so far has been most helpful, and that there is every indication that they will co-operate as far as possible with the Council in its important work.

There is no prospect of major rivers-control and soil-conservation work being undertaken during the war period, but research and investigations are being carried out as far as the very limited staff available will permit.

A notable occasion during the year was the establishment for the first time of railway communication between Gisborne and the existing trunk line at Waikokopu, an event long anticipated by the settlers in the Poverty Bay district.

Although for a time work was practically suspended on the South Island Main Trunk Railway, constructional operations have been expedited in order that rail traffic can be extended and road services correspondingly curtailed at the earliest possible date. As I regard the conservation of rubber and petrol as a most vital matter, I have made personal efforts to see that the work of platelaying has been pushed on with best possible use of our now very limited resources in men and materials.