

So far the activities of the Ministry of Works have been concerned principally with the Dominion's Defence Construction Programme, but the position has now been reached where attention must be given to construction proposals for the post-war period. In this respect the Ministry of Works may be compared with the Ministry of Works and Planning established in Great Britain and with the National Works Council in Australia, which was formerly the Allied Works Council charged with the carrying-out of Australia's defence-construction programme, but which has now been reconstituted on a peacetime basis for the supervision and planning of that Dominion's post-war constructional activities.

Likewise in New Zealand, the Ministry of Works will devote its attention to an examination of the relative merits of all proposed works from the point of view of essentiality, having particular regard to the availability of man-power and materials; to ensure that as far as is practicable no work is undertaken which conflicts with the interests of the nation; and to determine priorities according to national urgency and importance. Already the constructional activities of all Government Departments are being investigated with a view to bringing down a long-range schedule of works co-ordinated in every way with our ability to proceed with them, and this review of constructional activities will extend to works proposed by local authorities or private persons, in so far as such works are dependent on the Government for financial assistance or for help in obtaining the requisite material.

For the greater part of the past eight years it has been my privilege to serve the Dominion as Minister in charge of public works, and it has become increasingly evident to me that the utmost attention must be given to the planning of developmental works if we are to secure real and lasting benefits from our enterprises.

Prior to the outbreak of war it was my practice to consider the broadest implications of the Government's development policy in relation to public works under my control. For example, the extensive roading and main highways works which were a feature of pre-war years were based upon the urgent needs of our primary producers and town-dwellers alike in respect of transport facilities and of the safe usage of our rural thoroughfares.

Even under normal conditions I would insist that future public works should be examined with due care and judgment, so that those of the greatest merit within the national economy would be given prior consideration.

To-day, however, we are confronted with conditions which are distinctly abnormal, and consequently there is an added responsibility upon those in office to see that wise decisions are applied to our immediate problems. This abnormal situation has been created by the cessation of ordinary construction during the war period, the dislocation of ordinary industrial conditions governing the availability of labour and materials, the buoyant outlook arising from the progressive successes of the Allied Nations, and the tremendous possibilities which will open up immediately after hostilities cease.

It must be realized that in the field of supply alone material will be restricted both as regards selection and quantity, and, at a time when the reconstruction of devastated lands will be paramount, it will be quite impracticable for us as a nation to embark upon projects of purely insular value, or as individuals to embark on building programmes that take no cognizance of national shortages of supply. I need hardly say that every avenue of supply is being exploited to the full and that under the control of the War Assets Realization Board every salvageable class of material that can be recovered from defence projects that are no longer necessary is being recovered and made available to industry.

I have referred to the limited availability of materials, and in some degree to the man-power situation, but I wish to emphasize that to-day, more than ever, these factors affect more than departmental programmes; indeed, they intrude upon every form of enterprise, whether in scope and development they are individual, community, or national.

It will be evident, then, that if we are to derive the greatest advantage in the post-war period, careful attention must be given to the correlation of individual, community, and national planning in such a way that, firstly, wasteful competition for what may be available is avoided, and, secondly, that whatever service is attempted will be the most effective and beneficial under prevailing circumstances.

At the moment there may be some obscurity as to New Zealand's actual part in international rehabilitation after the war, but it is patent to us all that we must be prepared to accept our share of responsibility, no matter in which direction it may rest.

The co-operation of every section of our community will be necessary to ensure that our planning shall be wise and practical, and I am confident that, with a realization of our needs, our obligations, and our limitations, we can make a valuable contribution to world re-establishment and to the further progress and prosperity of our Dominion.

FINANCE

The payments and receipts in connection with the Public Works Account and other associated votes and accounts for the year 1943-44 are shown in the tabulation following.

The expenditure for the year administered through the Department reached a gross total of £24,193,328, of which sum £11,485,447 was on account of the Dominion's defence programme carried out on behalf of the respective Defence Services. The amounts received as credits-in-aid show an aggregate of £4,797,798, leaving net expenditure at £19,395,530.