

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 for the year ended 31st March, 1944, together with a statement of expenditure certified by the Controller and Auditor-General.

I wish to record my appreciation of the loyal service rendered and the assistance given by the staff and workmen of my Department, who have again been called upon to work under considerable stress and difficulties.

Up to the present 1,115 members of the staff have served with the Armed Forces, and I very much regret that 59 have made the supreme sacrifice, while many others have been wounded or taken prisoner of war.

So far as constructional activities for defence requirements are concerned, we have now passed the peak period, and whilst there is still a number of defence works to be carried out, these are confined to relatively minor items of a more permanent nature.

I should like to place on record warm appreciation of the magnificent achievements of the past four years in regard to the extensive building of temporary, semi-permanent, and permanent works of all kinds which became imperative in order to enable this Dominion to play its part in the present world struggle.

For obvious reasons it is not possible for me to give here all the details of the tremendous range of works which have had to be done, nor of the substantial number of works which were promoted under conditions of great difficulty, but I can assure honourable members and the people of our country that they have every reason to be proud of and well satisfied with the achievements within our own borders. The following figures, however, will convey an idea of the magnitude of the defence construction programme. They differentiate between the works carried out by the Public Works and the Housing Construction Departments for the three branches of our own Armed Forces and for United States Forces, and cover the period from the outbreak of war up to 31st March last:—

	Public Works Department.	Housing Construction Department.	Total.
	£	£	£
Army	13,447,829	541,418	13,989,247
Navy	2,227,789	..	2,227,789
Air Force	13,418,267	673,724	14,091,991
U.S. Forces	5,253,351	955,108	6,208,459
	<u>£34,347,236</u>	<u>£2,170,250</u>	<u>£36,517,486</u>

While maintaining our efforts overseas, we have had to provide also for our own defence, accommodate our own Forces and those of our Allies, and establish ancillary services, depots, &c. All this had to be done with the utmost speed when our safety was threatened and at a time when the man-power position and the supply of materials was becoming progressively more and more difficult. The response of all who shared in this important work is deserving of the highest praise.

Now that defence construction has tapered off it is possible to give attention to certain civil projects of particular national importance at the present time. I refer to the urgent need for augmenting the supply of electric power, the prosecution of roading and irrigation works for the purpose of assisting in our efforts to increase primary production in view of the world food problem, and the essential construction of roading and other services associated with the acceleration of State housing construction.

Honourable members will recall that while the construction of some railways had to be suspended during the war period efforts were made to complete the relatively small section of the South Island Main Trunk Railway, and thus relieve the transport situation. On 11th March last I had the pleasure of officially opening the Clarence-Kaikoura Section, and, with the exception of the uncompleted length of 13 miles 37 chains between Kaikoura and Oaro, traffic is being operated over the whole of this line. Storm damage has delayed work on the uncompleted section, but it is anticipated that within the next twelve months traffic will be conducted over the whole length of this railway.