

From the first experimental building erected in prefabricated concrete much experience and knowledge was gained. The result warranted the construction of further buildings to try out various systems of prefabricated-concrete methods of construction.

In view of the general shortage of materials, the Department has investigated and developed new types of finish and construction in an endeavour to relieve this position. To-day it is the material and man-power supply that are the deciding factors as to the number of houses that can be erected. The Department is letting contracts to the extent dictated by this question of available materials and man-power.

Whilst the defence-works programme tapered off to a certain degree, during the period under review a large programme was implemented for the prefabrication in parts of hutments and warehouses of all types for the Armed Forces and also of aircraft pens for shipment overseas. This necessitated the establishment of marshalling-yards at the four main centres to cope with the rush period. Although this work has now been practically completed, there is still a considerable number of parts in stock and some months will elapse before the programme is finally closed.

(2) *Purchase of Land*.—To enable housing construction to be vigorously accelerated at any time in the immediate and post-war future, an active policy of purchasing suitable land has been followed, a reserve of sections for future use has been built up, and a steady volume of work has been maintained in planning the development of these sections.

During the year the number of building-sites purchased totalled 4,332, the actual purchase to date being approximately 40,116.

The number of serviced sections available for purchase has been strictly limited, and as a general policy the Department has not unduly encroached on such sections, in order that they may remain available for private enterprise.

(3) *Land-development*.—Although shortage of man-power has restricted the programme, during the year many major development works were put in hand, either by contract, by direct labour, by municipal authorities, or by the Public Works Department. The man-power position improved during the course of the year and roadmaking plant also became available, and thus many unfinished works were able to be brought to completion.

In order to effectively deal with a greatly expanded housing-construction programme in the immediate post-war period it is necessary to build up a substantial reserve of building land served by roads, drainage, and other necessary domestic services. The development of land has therefore been prosecuted during the past year to the limit of available man-power and materials; operations in this direction will be continued and expanded as the man-power position improves.

(4) *Standards*.—At the inception of the Department certain standards of accommodation and construction were adopted, and with minor variations these have been adhered to throughout. The standards of accommodation were not minimum standards, and were dictated by the desire to maintain and improve the high standard of living enjoyed in this country, not by the desire to build the cheapest houses. Similarly, the standard of construction was such that an enduring asset to the country would result.

(5) *Housing Improvement*.—During the past year considerable attention has been given to this problem, which is causing much concern to municipal and health authorities. Further progress has been made to a stage where a revised and more comprehensive Bill is now in the hands of the Law Draughtsman. When this draft Bill has been prepared it is proposed that a conference of representatives of all interested and local authorities be arranged to consider the same.

(6) *Rural Housing*.—The scheme is being promoted by the Government as a means of increasing primary production. It is financed by the State Advances Corporation through the Rural Housing Act, 1919, will be administered by the Ministry of Works, and the actual provision of housing accommodation will be provided by the Housing Department. Plans for the adoption of surplus Army buildings are in course of preparation in which temporary and permanent accommodation can be provided from certain prefabricated materials originally intended for military use. Until the needs of the farmers have been ascertained, the amount and scope of the rural house-building programme is one of conjecture, but it is anticipated that the scheme will develop in considerable proportions, involving the Department and the building industry in widespread building activity.

(7) *Man-power*.—With the tapering-off of the defence-building programme, the man-power in the building industry has, with few exceptions, returned to normal activity, and in the case of State housing contracts throughout the Dominion there was as at 31st March a total labour force involved of 3,170. This number will be augmented by the rehabilitation of ex-servicemen for engagement in the building industry upon vital works such as rural housing. Due to the draw-off of man-power to the Armed Forces, the man-power in the allied building trades has been unbalanced, resulting in certain difficulties arising in the efficient prosecution of constructional works. While the man-power position in general in the industry is in a more satisfactory position to-day than at any other time during the war period, maximum production is frustrated to some extent due to the difficult material-supply position pertaining to certain critical building commodities.

(8) *Expenditure*.—As at 31st March, 1944, the total net payments in respect of the purchase of land, provision of services, erection of joinery-factories, erection of houses, and all administrative charges amounted to £23,945,100. Liabilities and commitments as at that date amounted to £3,045,800. The net expenditure for the year under review was £2,091,800. The total cost of administration of the Department (exclusive of interest charges) from its inauguration to date is £659,100. It will be seen that the administrative costs are still remarkably low, being 2·84 per cent. of the net expenditure (excluding administration costs) since the commencement of operations and 2·2 per cent. for the financial year under review.