

With the availability of heavy earth-moving plant and the return of servicemen to their peacetime avocations, it is expected that comprehensive river-control schemes in the lower reaches of the more important rivers can be commenced as soon as surveys and plans and financial arrangements are completed.

However, I must again impress honourable members with the fact that such measures are mainly in the nature of a short-term palliative. Remedial or protective steps must go further than this and relate to work designed to prevent the soil and debris from being washed from the land and from being deposited in the river-channels.

On the steep hinterlands, where pasture cannot be held satisfactorily, large areas must be retired from grazing by animals, protected from all fires, and either be regenerated in native forest or be reafforested; this will not only provide the necessary protective covering, but in the years to come will supplement the nation's sources of useful timber. On sloping lands, where it is practicable to retain pasture, activities should be along the lines of strengthening this pasture cover by reseeded, by provision of fertilizers, or by better methods of pasture management and better control of land use. In many cases there are small isolated works, of holding slips, or plugging gullies, or retiring small areas of steep slope. These may require in some instances modest engineering works to save the soil, but it is evident that the greatest results will come from improvements in the use of the land. The conditions referred to are the sources of much of the soil and debris which pour down into the main river valleys to raise the beds of the rivers and imperil by flood or deposit the richest of our low lands; it is from here that our irreplaceable soil is lost; it is here that by good farming and conservation the amount of rain which soaks into the soil can be increased and surface run-off of the balance of the rain can be delayed so that it trickles rather than runs down erodible slopes and stream beds; from here flood crests can be lessened and the amount of soil washed annually to sea can be decreased.

These are some of the problems which confront the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Council, but, with the assistance and co-operation of Government Departments, Catchment Boards, local bodies, and landowners, a definite plan of campaign is emerging. It is by the progressive execution of such a plan that lasting benefit to the nation will be achieved.

RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION

Another important milestone in the history of railway construction in New Zealand was reached when the South Island Main Trunk Railway was opened for through traffic. It was my privilege to drive the last spike on the 29th September, 1945, and subsequently the settlers of North Canterbury and Marlborough celebrated the long-awaited occasion which marked the formal introduction of through railway transport facilities in these districts. In the last section of the line constructed a considerable amount of tunnelling was necessary, and some of the tunnels are through unstable and difficult country. Difficulties, to which I have alluded before, have been encountered, and possibly later some further strengthening work will be required. This, it is thought, will not necessitate any interruption of the service, and will be put in hand as labour and materials permit.

Consequent upon the development of State housing projects in the Hutt Valley, existing railway facilities have had to be extended, and a regular service is now running as far as Naenae Station, 1 mile 40 chains beyond Waterloo. It is hoped that a single track to Taita Station, 1 mile 40 chains beyond Naenae, will be completed soon. Investigations are in hand in connection with several alternative schemes for extending the line through the Taita Gorge to join the existing line near Silverstream.