

PLANT AND MECHANICAL

The expansion of industries during the war has had a marked influence on the demand for men trained in the mechanical trades and, despite the return of so many men from the Armed Forces, a shortage still exists. Lack of these skilled men has somewhat held up work in the Department's workshops, and, where possible, available firms have been engaged to carry out certain work.

The role of mechanical equipment in an organization such as the Public Works Department can scarcely be overemphasized. It not only reduces the cost and increases the speed of many types of construction, but it greatly extends the range of economic feasibility. Certain types of works would have been impossible without the aid of machines, notably large drainage and river clearing works and others quite uneconomic, such as stumping and land clearing for agricultural purposes. The use of mechanical plant has reduced the physical demands on workmen and generally has improved the working-conditions and lowered the risk of accident. Most important, perhaps, is the strong interest of the younger generation, especially returned servicemen, in the use and maintenance of machinery of all kinds, arising no doubt from the call for mental as well as physical aptitude.

Before the war the Public Works Department had reached a high level of mechanization with the best type of plant then available, but the extraordinary demands of the war construction programme, coupled with the direct loss of much plant to the Forces overseas, had, at the cessation of hostilities, greatly weakened the plant position. Mechanical equipment played a prominent part in the prosecution of the war, and when it ended I foresaw an exceptional opportunity to replace much of what we had lost. Accordingly, my Chief Mechanical Engineer and other experts were sent to the Pacific area, where arrangements were made for the purchase of a considerable amount of plant and machinery from the American Forces. Most of this equipment has reached New Zealand and has been examined and sorted for distribution to the various districts as transport becomes available. I am pleased to be able to say that the transaction was eminently satisfactory to both parties, and that as a result the Department's mechanical equipment has been restored to its pre-war efficiency, and, in some respects, is now superior. With the addition of certain items still to arrive the Department will possess sufficient equipment to enable it to undertake the large programme of works which lie ahead.

I wish to acknowledge the loyal and efficient co-operation given by officers and workmen throughout the whole of the Department.

In particular, I desire to place on record the Government's appreciation of the services of the following officers who have retired after completing forty years' service:—Mr. W. L. Newnham, Engineer-in-Chief; Mr. T. M. Ball, Assistant Engineer-in-Chief; Mr. H. Watkinson, Inspecting Engineer; Mr. John Thompson, Divisional Officer; Mr. V. C. Curtis, Chief Clerk, Christchurch; Mr. G. F. Jackson, Roads Clerk, Head Office.

Further information relating to public works carried out during the past year is included in the attached reports by the Engineer-in-Chief, the Government Architect, and the Director of Housing Construction.

The report of the Chief Electrical Engineer, which hitherto was attached to the Public Works Statement, is being submitted separately this year in view of the constitution of the State Hydro-electric Department, and will be included in parliamentary paper D-4.

In accordance with section 24 of the Main Highways Act, 1922, the annual report of the Main Highways Board for the year ended 31st March, 1946, is also submitted herewith, *vide* Appendix E.

As required by subsection (2) of section 33 of the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Act, 1941, I also submit with this statement the annual report of the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Council covering the operations of the Council for the year ended 31st March, 1946.

R. SEMPLE,

Minister of Works.