

During the year, orders were placed for a number of new machines, in the main to replace worn-out plant. Much difficulty is being experienced in obtaining plant from overseas, and for this reason many items are being used beyond their economical life, thus placing a heavy burden on the staff at the repair depots.

The mechanical design staff at Head Office has done good work in designing numerous plant items for special types of work, and manufacture has been undertaken by local firms. Manufacture has been slowed up owing to the shortage of certain materials and parts.

SERVICES TO OTHER GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND LOCAL BODIES

In my last report I referred to the numerous services rendered by the Ministry of Works and the Public Works Department for other Government Departments and local authorities. In this direction the volume of work has been exceptionally heavy during the past year. This is only natural, considering the accumulated arrears of work which Government Departments and local bodies are most anxious to overtake with the least possible delay. For this reason, investigations have been numerous and the collation of data for the preparation of the necessary reports has intensified the work of the engineering, architectural, planning, and legal staffs. Much of this work has been undertaken at the request of Treasury.

My Department has continued to be responsible for the general maintenance of departmental and other Government buildings throughout the country, much of which work had, of necessity, been held over during the war years.

PUBLIC WORKS WORKERS' AGREEMENT

Last year I reported that the Public Works Workers' agreement had been renewed for a further period of two years, and an indication was given that the agreement regarding the conditions of employment for workers engaged on the maintenance of highways and roads would shortly come under review. The latter agreement has since been revised and renewed with amendments. The principal adjustments relate to improved provisions, particularly in reference to allowances, travelling-time, overtime, country work, and accommodation.

Over the many years that I have been privileged to serve the Dominion as Minister of Works, it has been most gratifying to have witnessed the whole-hearted appreciation expressed by many thousands of workers of the vastly improved working-conditions and wages which have been provided by my Government. The consideration shown by the Government in this direction is no doubt also mainly responsible for the co-operative and reasonable manner in which the executives of the union have approached me on matters affecting their members and their working-conditions.

During the past year, with the exception of the Mangakino hydro-electric project, works were exceptionally free from industrial disputes. It can therefore be understood how disappointing to the Government was the serious loss of working-time which occurred at Mangakino, and which would have been avoided but for the actions of one irresponsible individual. From the outset it was clear to me that at Mangakino there was in the making an effort by the Communistic element to gain control of that work, and if successful there, no opportunity would have been lost by them to achieve similar control over other works. As the uncompromising attitude of the Communists persisted, to ensure a speedy settlement there was no alternative but to appoint a Tribunal to investigate and adjudicate on those matters in dispute. The Tribunal upheld the actions of the Engineer in Charge at Mangakino, and the man responsible for the trouble was transferred from the works.