

SOIL CONSERVATION AND RIVERS CONTROL AND LAND-DEVELOPMENT GENERALLY

Under the control of the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Council, twelve Catchment Boards are operating and very definite progress has been made in the implementation of the Government's policy of soil conservation and river control. It is recognized that the preservation of the country's topsoil and the protection of farming-lands from flooding is of prime importance to the Dominion's future development. For this reason alone, the greater part of the expenditure required must be found from State funds. Although good work has been done by the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Council and the Catchment Boards, in view of the extent of the State's financial contribution, the administrative machinery set up by the principal Act is being examined with a view to possible amendments aimed at securing the very necessary results in the most economical way and in the shortest possible time.

The principal point of criticism is the association of soil conservation with river control. In the United States, where I had an opportunity of examining this problem, these two functions are disassociated, soil conservation being entrusted to the Department of Agriculture, whilst river control remains the responsibility of the United States Army Engineers. This is a generalization only, but the dissociation is considered desirable because of the great difference in the technique of soil conservation as against that required for dealing with river control. It must be remembered, however, that the upland areas forming the main catchments and the lower reaches where flooding usually occurs are much further apart there than they are in New Zealand, and for this reason alone it is not possible in the United States to have the close association which is being attempted by the empowering legislation in this country. There are definite advantages in maintaining this close association, and the fullest consideration must be given to the ultimate effects before any steps are taken to alter the existing administrative machinery. There is no doubt that in this country a serious problem in regard to erosion exists which must always remain of prime concern to the Government.

Apart from operations under the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Council, there are several major schemes of land-development and irrigation in both Islands which have been held up mainly on account of lack of man-power and materials. It is hoped that in the near future sufficient labour, plant, and materials can be made available so that action in regard to several of these schemes may be initiated.

RAILWAYS

In view of the divergence of opinion which exists in Auckland as to the location of further railway facilities, and because of the importance of a correct decision to the future of the city, I was instructed to consult with Sir William Halcrow, formerly President of the British Institution of Engineers, and a recognized engineering authority on this subject. The Government has now arranged to bring to New Zealand both Sir William and Mr. J. P. Thomas, late General Manager of the London Transport Advisory Council. It is hoped that as a result of their recommendations some action in regard to the provision of further transport facilities in Auckland can be taken at an early date.

Work on the Rimutaka Tunnel has been held up on account of shortage of man-power and cement. Decisions to put diversion cuts at the hydro-electric works at Whakamaru and Roxburgh will make available more tunnellers than was originally expected, and these will be employed as they become available on opening up at both ends of the tunnel. The tunnel itself is a considerable undertaking. It is longer than the Otira Tunnel, which under better conditions took some fifteen years to complete. A close examination