

1920.

NEW ZEALAND.

PUBLIC WORKS STATEMENT.

BY THE HON. J. G. COATES, MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS.

MR. SPEAKER,—

Though nominally assuming office as Minister of Public Works on the 1st April, I did not actually take over the administrative control of the Department until some weeks later. I desire to express my gratitude to my predecessor in office, the Hon. Sir William Fraser, for his valuable assistance both at the period of my initiation and on many occasions since. Sir William Fraser held this portfolio for eight years, and no one realizes better than myself the splendid work he accomplished during one of the most difficult periods in the history of this country. I desire also to refer to the retirement of Mr. R. W. Holmes, Engineer-in-Chief and Under-Secretary to the Department. For many years Mr. Holmes took a leading part in the administration of the Department, and the Dominion has greatly benefited from his wide experience and his exceptional engineering qualifications. Mr. F. W. Furkert succeeds him.

To meet the urgent demands upon the Department at this period, when so much leeway, due to the almost total cessation of operations during the war, has to be overtaken, further reorganization has been effected. Office administration has been separated from the engineering branches, and both have been further sectionalized. The number of Inspecting Engineers has been increased. The object aimed at is decentralization, and the placing of more direct responsibility on the officials.

In order to ensure a contented and efficient body of employees every effort is now made to properly house and provide for the comfort of the men. Collapsible huts, amusement-halls, and Y.M.C.A. canteens have been erected at some works, and others are being arranged. The men themselves are encouraged to take a practical interest in all matters pertaining to the work in hand. I intend to encourage the straight-out contract system, and to give every assistance to groups of men by providing machinery and material on charge. I feel confident that the course pursued will be to the country's advantage. It will secure expedition and the full energy of the men in the carrying-out of our constructive works.

The task of developing as rapidly as possible our latent hydro-electric energy is of urgent importance. The Government is fully aware of this fact, and every possible provision will be made accordingly. A separate Hydro-electric Branch has been formed, and Mr. L. Birks has been placed in charge, with a staff of Engineers and with the necessary clerical assistance. An Advisory Board will be set up to further advise the Government, and, later, to control generally the business side.