

and, to a lesser extent, the secondary industries, may be brought into convenient and economical communication with other markets, whether the same be overseas or local. Where the produce to be carried is heavy, or the distances are long, the railway still remains the cheapest method, and with the funds available, under a reasonable development scheme, steady progress will be made, and all the disconnected links of the national system will be eventually connected, as well as in some cases pushing existing lines out into country at present unprovided with adequate transport.

With roads my sympathies have always primarily been with the settlers in the backblocks, and while it is necessary in the march of modern progress to provide money whereby modern mechanical transport can be encouraged to operate over gradually increasing lengths, the primary object of ordinary public-works road expenditure must be directed to the providing for opening up access into new country, or providing better access to those settlers who in the past have bravely advanced into the wilderness and proceeded to carve out a home for themselves in advance of the roading facilities which were available in the older settled districts.

The institution of the Main Highways Board, and the declaration of some six thousand miles of main highways, together with their own finance, largely provided directly by the owners of mechanical transport, should make adequate provision for the communications which are required, as it were, between the pioneer backblocks road and the railway or the port.

The highways scheme is more or less in its infancy, but it has, even during the portion of the year in which it has been actively operating, done a very considerable amount of work, and as its finances improve as the result of the steady increase in the numbers of vehicles and the extent of their travel, so the facilities which can be derived will increase at an even greater rate.

With regard to the hydro-electric development, my policy is well known. It is to make such arrangements as will result in an adequate supply of reasonably priced electricity being available for every person in the Dominion to whom it can be provided with an expectation of a satisfactory financial return.

I hope as time goes on to have every public Department housed in buildings which will permit of departmental officers carrying out their duties with efficiency and comfort, and which will be a credit to the General Government and to the country. At the same time the question of permanency and reasonable future expansion will not be lost sight of.

With regard to irrigation operations, so far these have been confined to the Province of Otago almost entirely, and I hope to expand the area under irrigation, and concurrently under intensive culture, as fast as the demand for land by new settlers requires, so that eventually every area of land which possesses the necessary elements of fertility, and to which water can be provided, may be brought into the maximum possible state of development. When the areas of Otago are fully developed, and quite likely before that, I am of opinion that the wonderful results thereby obtained will cause the farmers of many of the dry parts of Canterbury, and even Marlborough, to move for the provision of irrigation systems in their districts, and when that time comes it will be the policy of the Government to meet the demand.

Generally speaking, while avoiding anything in the nature of a boom by means of borrowed money, I hope to continue to spend capital on works which have a reasonable prospect of financial soundness, and which will improve the general productiveness of the country and the comfort and contentment of its people.

As appendices to this Statement, honourable members will find full details of the principal works carried out by the Department in the reports of the Engineer-in-Chief, Government Architect, Chief Electrical Engineer, and Main Highways Board, respectively.

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