

1927.

NEW ZEALAND.

PUBLIC WORKS STATEMENT

(BY THE HON. K. S. WILLIAMS, MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS).

MR. SPEAKER,—

As honourable members are aware, it is just a little over one year since I assumed Ministerial control of the Public Works Department. During that period I have tried to study carefully the administration of the Department in its several branches, and in making my inquiries I have always enjoyed the cheerful assistance of all members of my staff. With a view to enabling me more fully to appreciate my predecessor's policy of public works and to obtain a personal knowledge of the large enterprises in hand, as well as the many smaller local works, I spent most of last recess in systematically inspecting wherever I was able the Department's operations throughout the Dominion. By these visits I have obtained valuable personal knowledge.

I have endeavoured to view the Department's operations from a purely Dominion standpoint, believing that local interests must always be subservient to national considerations. On the administration side, I have followed the policy of concentration and expeditious achievement laid down by my predecessor in 1921. It is my endeavour to prevent waste, and so obtain good value to the State on all works undertaken by my Department.

The country is at present suffering from a temporary depression, caused by a general decrease in the value of our primary products. This state of affairs has occurred before, and will happen again in our history, and it would be wise for us to bear that in mind and prepare ourselves to meet such occasions. World prices for our primary products we cannot control; but we can increase production within our own country to ease the financial blow that this country inevitably receives on a fall of prices for our primary products. With a view to encouraging increased production from our country districts, it is my desire, by providing railway transport, hydro-electric facilities, and road improvements, to enable farming operations to be carried on economically and without hindrance, and by irrigation, flood control, and drainage to bring into full productivity lands not now fully utilized.

I feel it my duty, as far as my financial resources will allow, to assist road-construction to open up lands where production is hampered by want of access. In many places, to my knowledge, it is, until comparatively late in the season, difficult and expensive for produce to be taken from the farm to the market. This is especially so in connection with dairy-produce from backblock farms, and this hardship is reflected in reduced returns to the producer. The Main Highways Board is relieving the position with regard to the main highways, and with the services rendered by railways great facilities are given for development work in the rural districts within reach of such means of transit. There still is, however, the roadless farmer in the most remote parts whose farming operations are restricted for want of proper access to the markets. His difficulties are accentuated by deflation in land-values and the ever-increasing rate burden for the maintenance of existing roads, caused by the extraordinary increase of motor transportation. His case obviously and of necessity requires our special attention.

The hydro-electric services supplied by the Department are rapidly springing into favour both in the cities and country districts, and it requires but little imagination to realize the enormous claims that will in the future be made upon these services for power and domestic uses.

In public-works construction it is imperative that national interests be paramount where they conflict with local desires. In arriving at decisions in this respect I must be guided by the Dominion scheme of construction to ensure proper connections with existing systems; and the expert reports of my Engineers, as to economy and efficiency of construction, and subsequent service, and the business to