

to restore telegraphic communications, and wireless operators were despatched to Westport, with which telegraphic communication was impossible, and communication was thus maintained by radio through ships in port there. Similar action was later taken in the case of Karamea, where it was necessary to establish a transmitting station. Tents and other equipment were supplied by the Government from the Defence Department stores, and refugees were conveyed free of charge by ordinary and special trains where necessary. I also made arrangements for a steamer to proceed to Westport to take away any one desirous of leaving the affected districts, and those who were not in a position to pay were not required to find the passage-money. This service is being continued as long as circumstances warrant. A steamer service was also inaugurated between Westport and Karamea.

The public response to relieve distress in the affected areas has been very gratifying. Requests for information as to the disposal of public subscriptions from various parts of the Dominion were made to me, and it seemed evident that the general opinion was that the best results could be obtained by the concentration of effort and the centralization of the funds; and a Central Earthquake Fund has therefore been established. A central committee has been set up for the purpose of co-ordinating the activities of the relief committees in the affected areas, and applications are being invited from residents and settlers for assistance from the relief funds to restore the damage to property. It is impossible at this stage to estimate what amount will be required for this purpose, but it is probable that the relief funds will only touch the fringe of what is necessary to ensure our fellow-citizens in the stricken areas all the help possible to restore their position. In the meantime, until the extent of the assistance required is known, the efforts of the local committees are being confined to preserving the comfort and health of the residents and the care of refugees. Local committees have, in general, aimed at providing at least one fire in each house, thus partially restoring essential comforts. It is recognized that the local relief committees have performed valuable work in this respect. In administering the relief funds so generously subscribed the policy must be that persons in the poorest circumstances shall be assisted first of all. Others may be able to repay the cost of repairs by instalments, but each case will receive careful consideration when all applications are received. It is essential to the equitable distribution of the relief funds to obtain a reliable estimate of the amount of assistance required.

Relief funds.

It will be realized that the restoration of the districts in roads, bridges, railways, public buildings, &c., will be a work of great magnitude, involving heavy expense to the Government. Attention will first be given to making tracks as temporary means of access to the settlements at present cut off as a result of the calamity. The Main Highways Board is arranging to reopen main roads where possible without delay, and where this cannot be done steps are being taken to open or explore new routes to the main centres in the area affected. The restoration of public buildings will also be carried out as quickly as possible.

Restoration-work.

As a desire has been expressed by local authorities to contribute towards the relief funds, legislation will be introduced to validate such grants by local authorities, including Harbour Boards. Grants by other public institutions, such as savings-banks, &c., will be similarly provided for.

Validating legislation for donations to Relief Fund.

STATE SUPERANNUATION FUNDS.

As I have previously indicated, the question of investigating the financial position of the State Superannuation Funds—i.e., the Public Service, Railways, and Teachers' Funds—has occupied a great deal of my attention. My investigation showed that the financial position of these funds is even worse than I had thought. The cash shortage on account of current pensions alone, which should have been covered by State subsidies in the past, is over £2,000,000. This huge shortage has arisen from the neglect in the past to pay the subsidies which the Actuary has certified from time to time, in terms of the Superannuation Act, as necessary to make up the amount required to pay the pensions of the public servants who have already retired. The pensions, of course, have been paid, but partly out of the contributions of the

State Superannuation Funds.