

Following the destruction of Napier by earthquake in February, 1931, unemployed labour was diverted almost wholly to the restoration of public services. The Board was struck by the fact that, nine months after the earthquake had occurred, there was very little rebuilding activity in the business area. It was represented to the Board members by the Commissioner of Napier (Mr. J. S. Barton) and by representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and other interests, that although a number of advances for rebuilding purposes had been arranged by the Rehabilitation Committee there was a very strong reluctance to rebuild, due to a doubt as to whether the business centre would actually ever arise on the same area. The key of the situation was agreed by all to be the large Masonic Hotel block, which previously had included a number of shops and had been in the centre of business activity. Representations, substantiated by figures, were made to the Board, that if some assistance could be given that would induce the rebuilding of the Masonic block, it would almost immediately be followed by great general activity in rebuilding operations. The amount of money standing between the principals of the Masonic block and rebuilding was £8,000.

From the Board's point of view it appeared that if the rebuilding of the Masonic block were really followed by the rebuilding of the Hastings Street properties that were said to be held in abeyance until commencement of operations on the Masonic block, the saving to the Unemployment Fund as a result of men being taken from relief into private employment on building-construction work would be far greater than the £8,000 which it was proposed should be lent.

The Unemployment Board determined to make the loan. That the move was more than justified has been proved beyond all question. Following the granting of this advance, and the commencement of operations on the Masonic block—no doubt assisted by the almost simultaneous introduction of the Board's No. 10 Scheme—something in the vicinity of £300,000 worth of building was commenced in Napier. Regarding the Masonic block separately from the other works which were more or less consequent upon it, the wages paid to registered married unemployed men engaged on that building total in the vicinity of £18,000; and ignoring the direct bearing on the reconstruction of Napier Borough and indirect benefits from renewed activity in the building industry, the saving of the Board's funds consequent upon this loan has far exceeded the value of the loan itself.

There are other examples of where a loan has been considered the most economical way of encouraging employment under normal conditions, but it is not necessary to outline the details of each one here, other than to say that the value of a loan has always been related to the saving of the Board's funds consequent on the employment of men taken from the unemployment register.

VOLUNTARY RELIEF ACTIVITIES.

Co-ordination of Relief.

Side by side with the relief activities of the Unemployment Board there exist in many centres voluntary relief organizations conducted by various other bodies and by committees of private citizens. Much good work is performed by these organizations in the alleviation of distress.

It is an anomaly in the operation of any organized system of relief that the more clamant type of petitioner for benefits frequently secures undeserved advantages over others equally eligible for assistance. The tendency is for this to become more pronounced during a period like the present when those eligible for relief include thousands to whom the state of actual indigence is novel, and the necessity of seeking relief repugnant. The Board takes the view that funds provided for the relief of distress due to unemployment should be directed to where such distress is discovered to exist. Private relief organizations are helpful in bringing under notice, from their more personal contacts, cases of deserving people whose rightful measure of relief is otherwise allotted elsewhere. Co-ordination of relief activities, by whoever carried on, has proved the most effective method of preventing exploitation, and in ensuring that people most needful in fact receive a proportionate measure of relief. In some centres this co-ordination has been effected to a high degree, and the Board urges its extension.

GRANTS FOR RELIEF OF UNEMPLOYED NATIVES.

Apart from the participation of Natives in the benefits of Scheme 5, grants totalling £18,000 were made during the financial year 1931-32 to the Native Department for the administration of relief in districts where there are considerable numbers of unemployed Natives. Such financial assistance is expended mainly on special development schemes organized by the Native Department, and in general the individual Maori is placed on contract work on farms much on the same lines as the Board's Scheme 4B.

Up to 31st March, 1932, a sum of £10,635 had been brought to charge from the total amount granted by the Board. At this date, according to figures supplied by the Native Department, the estimated labour cost of contracts arranged through these grants was just over £42,000, of which £12,500 represented the cost in subsidies for the employment of nearly two thousand Maoris.

The nature and extent of work done or to be carried out as a result of such contracts are as follow :—

								Acres.
Scrub-cutting	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	22,000
Bushfelling	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	10,500
Stumping, grubbing, and clearing	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	6,000
Ploughing and harrowing	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	2,500
								Chains.
Fencing	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	12,000
Draining	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	2,000

The general situation in regard to Natives is discussed at page 8.