

1936.
NEW ZEALAND.

PUBLIC WORKS STATEMENT

(BY THE HON. R. SEMPLE, MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS).

MR. SPEAKER,—

Since I took control of the Public Works Department in December last my whole energies have been concentrated in endeavouring to revitalize the activities of this important Department. On assuming office I found there was not in existence a policy which could be relied upon to give sufficient guidance to the head of the Department and his staff and which was necessary if the Department was to function in the most efficient and satisfactory way. My effort has been to frame a policy such as I believe will ultimately result in clearly defining the system upon which the Government intends to carry out its public works, and which will give to the Department that lead which it can rightly expect from the Minister in Control.

I was quite prepared to find, owing to several years of financial depression, that there might not be a settled policy, and I make due allowance for such difficulties, but I was not prepared to find that the whole of the public-works activities had been converted into a system of relief for unemployment.

With this end solely in view, methods of work had been adopted which were not only uneconomical but, to say the least of it, were highly demoralizing to the men compelled to work under such conditions. It was a surprise to me that after years of work under this system the staff and workmen of the Department should have retained the will and energy to work, which I found still existed among them.

The whole position was most unsatisfactory, and gave absolutely no incentive to any one to give of his best. New life needed to be infused into the workmen employed by the Department.

In general, no exception could be taken to the value of the works upon which they were engaged. Some of them I did not approve of, and I did not hesitate to stop them. I shall refer to such works later. Others I would have stopped had they not progressed too far to make it inadvisable to do so; there were other works which should obviously have been started and had not. The Government has gone carefully into the necessity or otherwise of such works, and many of them have now been put in hand. These works are given in more detail in this Statement, and I venture to say that there is not one of them that will not be found to return some economic value to the State.

I wish at present, however, to dwell more upon the method of carrying out these works than upon their national benefit.

In an age when machinery is doing so much to relieve the burden of hard work, and to reduce expenditure in every direction, I could not agree to continue to carry out work by methods that involved the unnecessary expenditure of energy and increase in cost, such as is inherent in a system of work for the relief of unemployment only. The engineers of my Department have had to carry out a most unpleasant