

From the above it will be seen that an endeavour has been made to provide reasonable conditions for the men to work under, and I now wish to outline the Government's proposals for works to give employment to as large a number of men as possible. When the Government assumed office at the beginning of December, 1935, 13,696 men were employed on public works, of whom 8,289 were employed on relief work, while for the week ending 15th August, 1936, 15,851 men were employed, most of whom were on standard works. It is intended to increase the number employed on public works to 20,000 as soon as possible.

It will be seen from the estimates of expenditure for the Consolidated Fund already submitted to Parliament that provision has been made for the assistance hitherto provided from unemployment taxation for public-works activities now being found from ordinary revenue. The principal amounts are for irrigation, £97,500; for land improvement, £71,000; for additions and improvements to open railway-lines, £77,000. In addition, the Consolidated Fund is providing £39,000 towards the construction and improvement of settlement roads, £20,000 towards the cost of renewal of road bridges, £80,000 for restoration of roadworks, bridges, &c., damaged by floods, and £20,000 for maintenance and repair of roads. For the construction of aerodromes and emergency landing-grounds £341,000 is being provided, whereas the expenditure from the Consolidated Fund for this service last year was £6,196.

Provision has also been made under the Consolidated Fund this year for £100,000 for the purchase of modern plant, which is additional to the amount of £90,000 for plant for main highways. The total vote for Maintenance of Public Works and Services under the Consolidated Fund is £1,182,500, as compared with an expenditure of £145,492 from this fund last year.

I am anxious to pursue an energetic policy of public works so as to provide national assets, and at the same time assist in relieving the distress caused by the drastic cessation of constructional works by the late Government. My colleague, the Hon. Minister of Finance, in the Budget referred to this subject of the curtailment of public works as being a material factor in the increase in unemployment throughout the Dominion. The diagram below shows how serious this sudden curtailment was in the economic life of the people.

From 1919 to 1931 expenditure increased from £1,350,408 to £8,388,529. In 1932 it dropped to £4,815,542, in 1933 to £1,727,076, and during the years ending 31st March, 1934, 1935, and 1936, expenditure was £2,087,781, £2,242,535, and £2,484,561.

