

1937.

NEW ZEALAND.

PUBLIC WORKS STATEMENT

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

MR. SPEAKER,—

As indicated in my Statement to Parliament last year, a policy of expansion of public works has been followed by the Government wherever it was possible to obtain sufficient economic value to justify the work undertaken.

It is the endeavour of the Department to carry out public works to a standard commensurate with their importance, and particularly is this so with works which have a substantial economic value, but from the very fact that certain works will only reach their full value in the future it is the policy of the Department to maintain the same high standard with these works.

I have travelled with and spoken to many visitors from overseas, including Ministers of the Crown from other British Dominions, and all have expressed their surprise at the advanced state of our roading-system in this country, and this can truthfully be said also of other works under the control of the Public Works Department.

I have made it my duty to visit all important works that were in progress during the year. I have spoken to the workmen wherever I have gone and impressed upon them the fact that the Government expects them to give a fair day's work for the wages they are receiving. I am prepared to admit that on many works the men are earning high wages, but I am satisfied that, wherever work is carried out on the co-operative contract system, the State is getting good value for its expenditure. The men on every class of construction have improved wonderfully in skill and in output of work during the year, and now they are an army of men the nation can be proud of.

I have not, however, contented myself with consideration only for the earnings of the men. I have also given a great deal of thought to the social side of their welfare. Social amenities in the way of entertainment-halls, libraries, canteens, &c., have been provided. Apart from the help I have received from the Department's engineers, I wish to place on record the great assistance I have received from the New Zealand Workers' Union and the Y.M.C.A. in these matters.

The agreement made with the New Zealand Workers' Union, to which I referred in my last year's Statement, has resulted in practically all disputes about work