

and working conditions being settled locally. The comparatively few disputes referred to me have been settled expeditiously, with the co-operation of the union officials in Wellington, and the interests of the Government as well as the men have been equitably conserved. Where workmen have ceased work in an unconstitutional manner the matter has been promptly and effectively dealt with. It must be remembered, and I hope appreciated, that my Department was faced with the difficulty of organizing a team of workmen from the army of unemployed in this country. Many of them had had their capacity for work destroyed during the depression years, while hundreds of other younger men had never learnt to work. In spite of these difficulties wonderful progress has been made.

An instance showing how it was possible to train men to special work within a short time was the erection of the Mohaka Viaduct on the East Coast Main Trunk Railway in record time, and considerably below the estimated cost. The erectors on this work were young men trained on the job. They were paid high wages as an encouragement to work, and they more than earned the increased rate of pay. This is just an example of what is occurring all over the Dominion on public works.

Improved accommodation for workmen has now been provided everywhere: married men have well-built three-room accommodation, and all camps are well provided with adequate drainage schemes and water-supplies.

The Y.M.C.A. is providing recreation and amusement in all large camps. It is doing this work well, and is of great assistance to the Department's staff. In order to make living conditions more attractive in the isolated places where most of the camps are, I have arranged for the Y.M.C.A. to sell radio sets on very easy terms to the workmen. The Department takes no direct action in the matter, but allows the Y.M.C.A. to obtain quotations for the sets through the Radio Traders' Federation and sell to the workmen under a hire-purchase system.

As an appendix to this Statement, honourable members will find a copy of the agreement between the National Council of the Y.M.C.A. and myself covering the whole procedure.

I gave an indication in last year's Statement that the policy of the Department would be to a large extent to expedite and lessen the cost of public works by the use of machinery. This has been done, and a sum of approximately £500,000 has been spent on modern plant for our works. This expenditure appears large, but the Department had no equipment to start with. When I tell honourable members that the Department has nearly twelve hundred works in hand requiring some type of plant, the disadvantages under which it was working can be realized. I have not endeavoured to replace men by machinery where it cannot be shown that a substantial saving will result, but rather to preserve the balance between speed and economy. There are many classes of work which can be carried out almost as economically by manual labour, supplemented by a small amount of mechanical plant, as they can be entirely by machinery, and in order not to increase the number of unemployed at the present time I have adhered to the former procedure even though some sacrifice has been made to speed in completing the work.

In other classes of work again the use of manual labour would be distinctly uneconomical, and only machinery is justifiable if the work is to be done at all. An example of this class of work is the formation of flying-fields for aerodromes. As an instance, the estimate to form an aerodrome at Nelson under the old system of utilizing the unemployed on relief work was £172,000. By machinery the work was estimated to cost £36,000, and a contract was actually let for this amount.