

operators, harbour authorities, and shipping interests to overcome their difficulties. The membership of these committees comprise representatives of varied and diverse interests, and I desire to congratulate them on the effective work they have done and also on the thoroughly harmonious relationships which have obtained not only within the committees, but also as between the committees and the interests affected by their operations.

This war has also shown that, from the broad national viewpoint, this Government's policy of extending the main railway systems of both Islands was amply justified. In order to relieve the position which arose from the rubber and fuel shortage, traffic was worked over the Waikokopu-Gisborne, the Dargaville-Kirikopuni, the Wharanui-Clarence, and the Westport-Inangahua sections as soon as practicable, even though these lines were not ready for taking over by the Railways Department. This working has produced vital economies in fuel and tires, and the completion of further portions of the South Island Main Trunk, and particularly the Hundalee-Oaro section, which will eliminate a heavy hill section of the road journey, should enable added savings in petrol and tires of a substantial nature to be made. This work is therefore being proceeded with as rapidly as possible.

When reviewing the work done by the railways one must also bear in mind that they have not been free to expand their staff and facilities to meet the greatly increased demand. On the staff side a total of 6,876 employees, or 26·6 per cent. of the pre-war staff, are at present serving with the armed forces, and a further 84 have been loaned to other Departments and to private firms engaged on war work. To some extent these men have been replaced by the new appointees and by the engagement of women, of whom 1,400 have been taken on by the railways since the commencement of the war. The work of these women in clerical positions, portering duties, the cleaning of cars, and other positions has been of extreme value to the Department. Nevertheless, the railway staff is still 3,215, or 12·5 per cent., below the pre-war figure, and this, coupled with loss of experienced men to the armed forces, has meant long hours and hard work for all sections of the staff.

In the workshops the rate of manufacture of munitions has been fully sustained throughout the year. The production of universal carrier parts, bodies for beaverettes, trench mortars, bomb casings, and of other types of equipment for all the Services has been continued, and to these has been added the building of marine engines and boilers for Navy trawlers. This work has been carried on without interfering with the maintenance of railway rolling-stock, which must, of course, be the prime factor for consideration in the activities of the Department's workshops. It will be realized, however, that owing to the difficulty in securing certain necessary parts from overseas a good deal of improvization has been necessary in order to maintain the locomotives and rolling-stock in a satisfactory state of repair.

The necessity for conserving paper-supplies still continues, and I again regret that I cannot give the Department's operations the extensive review they merit, but from the foregoing short review I think it will be apparent to all that the railways have risen to the occasion in no uncertain manner.

CONCLUSION

Since I have assumed the office of Minister of Railways I have had an opportunity of travelling extensively throughout New Zealand and have had the pleasure of coming in contact with the rank and file of the Railway Service, and I feel bound to say that I have the greatest admiration for the manner in which the Railway staff as a whole carry out their duties, particularly the operating section, who have given efficient service during the past year, and I feel proud to be the Minister in charge of the Department where those concerned have given of their best under the most exceptional and trying conditions. The harmonious relationships existing between the Minister, the Management, and the staff referred to by me in the Railways Statement for 1942 have been more than maintained during the year under review.

In conclusion, let me once again thank the General Manager, Mr. E. Casey, and the Assistant General Manager, Mr. J. Sawers, for their unfailing courtesy and help throughout the year.