

The primary purpose in making known the Government's intentions in regard to developmental works is the realization that, without knowledge of the Government's intentions, it is scarcely possible for local authorities and for private interests to plan safely ahead. This is particularly the case in urban areas, and the review of all proposals conducted by the Ministry of Works has shown that it is not possible to regard the works of Government Departments in isolation and that these must be considered jointly with those of local authorities and of private people. It is hoped that, by enlisting the support of local authorities on a regional basis, the Government will have much valuable advice bearing upon its own works, and by this method in time a broad developmental plan for each region will be prepared in which the interests not only of the Government, but of local authorities and of primary and secondary industry, will be fully observed.

The annual estimates of expenditure from the Public Works Account will, of course, bear a direct relationship to the works programme of the Dominion as a whole as determined from time to time by the Ministry of Works. The adoption of some means whereby the use of resources to the best advantage will be facilitated by planning in advance will aid in promoting full-time and economic employment for workers and also a balanced distribution of labour between various community and industrial needs. The method of framing the annual estimates in conformity with these ideals may require adjustment from time to time until the most satisfactory basis has been evolved from practical experience.

The supply of steel is still most acute, and, although production has now been resumed at Broken Hill, Australia, indications are that considerable delays must be expected in fulfilling orders which have been placed. Inquiries through the High Commissioner for New Zealand, London, revealed that round mild-steel rods could be delivered at a comparatively early date, and steps have therefore been taken to obtain a supply from this source.

As far as construction works are concerned, the supply of cement is still very much below requirements. To relieve the demand on local supplies and with a view to facilitating continuity of construction of the more important works—i.e., hydro-electric dams, power-houses, the general housing schemes—my Department placed orders for a supply of Australian cement, some of which has come to hand.

The passing of the Electricity Act, 1945, effected the constitution of the State Hydro-electric Department as a separate departmental unit, thereby severing this State activity from the Public Works Department, with which it had been associated since its inception. Though the design work in connection with new hydro-electric schemes will be executed by the State Hydro-electric Department, the construction work will continue to be undertaken by the Public Works Department, whilst operation and maintenance of completed sections will be under the direct jurisdiction of the new department.

My Department is experiencing considerable difficulty arising from the shortage of trained staff in practically all classifications. Of the 1,369 officers who were granted leave for military service, only 1,006 have so far returned to duty. Many of the younger men who served with the Armed Forces had not acquired very much departmental experience before proceeding on active service. Returning after four, five, and, in some cases, six years' absence, they are obviously handicapped in respect of tasks that, in normal circumstances, would have been assigned to them. Every endeavour is being made to assist these officers by special training and instruction, and several have taken advantage of the special refresher course provided by the Public Service Commissioner. A number are attending full-time University courses and, in the case of engineers, some, who for one reason or another were unable to take the University course this year, are in the field receiving practical training. Part-time University courses and correspondence