

Housing requires some special mention. It is the policy of my Government to encourage people to own their own homes and increased facilities to enable them to do this have been made available. Having regard to the fact that our economy depends in the main on our primary production, the Government is anxious that more houses should be built in the rural areas and in the smaller towns and is taking the necessary steps to ensure that an improvement of the housing position in these areas is secured. At the same time the Government is conscious of the fact that there still remains much to be done to overtake the existing acute shortage of housing accommodation in the larger centres. The construction of State houses will be continued, but the Government hopes that, by making available to individuals and to building organizations land near the larger centres, there will be sufficient inducement for private interests to build homes instead of the Government accepting such a heavy responsibility in this particular field.

I should here mention the need for the clearance of slums in our major cities. This is long overdue. It is a matter in which the Government is particularly concerned and on which discussions with local bodies have already commenced. It is intended that the State's responsibility should be limited to financial assistance and that the planning and actual work of demolition, rebuilding, and rehousing of displaced persons should be the responsibility of the local authorities. I am sure that the Government's intentions in this direction will have the whole-hearted support of local bodies and the general public.

In the course of my inspections, and these have been made in some detail, I have met the principal officers of the Ministry of Works and have paid particular attention to the departmental organization in all its aspects. It is evident that since the end of the war the Commissioner of Works and his staff have worked under the greatest difficulties in endeavouring to meet the demands placed upon the Department during a period of serious man-power and material shortages. In spite of this I consider that the Department has coped with its post-war difficulties very successfully. I have been much impressed with the enthusiasm of the officers I have met and with the ability which they show in tackling the many problems connected with the programme of work now under way.

The activities of the Ministry of Works cover a wide and diverse field involving the expenditure of large sums of public money. In the post-war period it has admittedly been very difficult to estimate costs ahead and to control expenditure once works were commenced. These difficulties still exist, but it is hoped that with a programme of work more closely related to the resources available that some stability in this matter can be reached and this alarming upsurge of costs arrested.

Although much of the Department's work is carried out by contract, I feel that there is a need for further extension of this policy. Other major works now being undertaken by the Department's own labour force should be opened up to competition by public tender as soon as circumstances permit, and the Department's labour force limited to that required for works of a maintenance character and to such other works which for various reasons cannot be submitted to public tender. With this change of policy I am sure the whole resources which can be made available to the Government will be used to greater advantage.