

present time the number of men engaged both on relief works and on ordinary standard works is in the vicinity of 17,000.

As a result of the necessity to provide employment for large numbers of men and the desire to do so with as little delay as possible, the suitability of certain roadworks for unskilled labour has perhaps in several cases been the deciding factor in favour of their commencement. Several of the large roadworks at present in hand could with advantage be held over until such time as transport requirements warrant their construction. This aspect of the present relief works is receiving attention. Most of the relief work in hand, apart from the operations of the Forestry Department, is road-construction, and although it is generally recognized by the local bodies in whose areas work is progressing that excellent work is being done and good value received for the money expended, I feel that in many cases the question of the subsequent maintenance of those roads, particularly if they are allowed to remain unmetalled, will present a difficulty to the local bodies, unless, of course, increased settlement in the districts served by these new roads can be brought about. It is hoped that, as a result of the improved access facilities now being provided to many more or less isolated localities by these relief-works roads, increased settlement will automatically follow. Nevertheless, I am strongly of opinion that more reproductive work can be found for the purpose of relieving unemployment than the building of roads, which work is, as honourable members will realize, not a permanent solution of the problem.

At the moment of writing there are 4,939 men employed by the Department on relief works which for the most part are situated in the out-back areas. Realizing the unfortunate predicament in which a regrettably large section of the community finds itself, and having regard to the fact that relief works in some form or another are likely to be required for some time to come, it is only right that a reasonable standard of comfort should be provided. In order that I may review the position and make any adjustments that may be deemed necessary, a special Inspecting Officer has been detailed to report in regard to all relief workers' camps. It is intended that accommodation, as far as it is possible, should be to a uniform standard and reasonably comfortable, at the same time having regard to the temporary nature of the works.

ROAD-CONSTRUCTION.

My remarks on railway-construction are in some ways applicable to road-construction, in so far as, under the extreme necessity of providing employment, roads have been made that in some cases are beyond the financial capacity of the local authorities to maintain, and are certainly years ahead of the demand of progressive settlement. In this connection attention is drawn to the graph on page xxii. A road, no less than a railway-line, is a liability on the community if it is not receiving its full share of use and assisting by the added facility which it provides to increase the production of the country and to lessen the cost of transportation. I propose during the coming recess to thoroughly investigate this position.

PROVISION FOR RAILWAY-CONSTRUCTION.

The sum available under this head is £1,570,000. I have necessarily framed the estimates for the year according to the requirements of the works now in progress, and honourable members must bear in mind that half the financial year is past, and that approximately one-half of the financial provision now being submitted for the approval of the House has been used. I cannot anticipate the adjustments that may be found necessary as the result of the investigations of the special Committee and the ultimate findings of Parliament and the Government based thereon, but I am convinced of the importance of considering other avenues of employment which may be imposed as the result of curtailments found necessary in the railway construction programme.

ALTERNATIVE MEASURES.

It must be patent to honourable members that alternative measures aiming to keep men in employment or to absorb a number of men now out of employment must take time to mature and to be put into operation, whether these take the form of the Unemployment Bill or concerted efforts in regard to land-development, increasing the area of State forest plantations, providing additional public buildings, irrigation, and grade-easements on open railway-lines.