

WORKSHOPS.

AMALGAMATION OF WORKSHOPS.

A matter that has received further attention through the year now that the main workshops are completed has been the amalgamation of the various workshops attached to the Maintenance Branch and the Signal and Electrical Branch into the reorganized Locomotive workshops.

The amalgamation of the Signal and Electrical Branch workshops at Wellington and the Maintenance Branch workshops at Kaiwarra with the Hutt workshops has been completely carried out.

The amalgamation of the Locomotive shops, Maintenance Branch shops, and Stores Branch facilities at Greymouth has been vigorously pursued, and is now nearing completion. In carrying out this work the whole of the combined requirements of these branches have been located at Elmer Lane on the same site as the recently completed locomotive running-shed.

The preliminary work in connection with amalgamating the Penrose workshops of the Maintenance Branch with Otahuhu workshops was taken in hand. The general plans for amalgamating the Maintenance shops with the Locomotive workshops at East Town (Wanganui) and Invercargill have been made.

Work on these projects, however, has not been proceeded with during the past year, principally owing to the necessity for restricting new expenditure.

STAFF.

The staff situation, particularly with regard to the main workshops, has been very difficult throughout the year, and there have been many occasions when work has had to be adjusted to suit the staff when, for the most economical operation, the staff itself should have been adjusted to suit the volume of work.

The following tabulation shows the staff variation for the past six years :—

Year.	Permanent Employees.	Casuals.	Term Casuals	Emergency Casuals.	Total.
1926	2,332	494	687	16	3,529
1927	2,355	475	674	33	3,537
1928	2,241	389	653	44	3,327
1929	2,211	413	643	383	3,650
1930	2,330	461	664	761	4,216
1931	2,317	458	565	333	3,673

The total staff employed at all workshops as at 31st March, 1931, was, it will be noticed, 543 less than the preceding year.

In general terms, it must be stated that the staff situation has not been satisfactory from an economical viewpoint, because the conditions that obtain when there is surplus staff can never be akin to efficient and economical working. It is anticipated that on account of the general depression the requirements from the workshops can be met with still less staff than that now employed. The reduced volume of capital work in the main workshops will also necessitate further staff reduction in due course.

In conclusion, on the question of staff in the workshops, I would emphasize that up to the present no employee on the permanent staff has been paid off in connection with the reduction of staff, only employees whose tenure was temporary being affected. We, of course, require to take on temporary employees from time to time to supplement the permanent-staff establishment in order to meet the fluctuations in the volume of work requiring to be done by the shops that are inevitable in our business. When these employees are taken on they are aware that they are not being placed on the permanent staff of the Department, and it is difficult to see how their retention can be justified when the work which required their employment in each case has been finished, and there is no other work at which they can be employed. Quite obviously if the staff is not to be adjusted to the fluctuations in the volume of work, then we would have to carry sufficient staff to deal with the maximum quantity of work that would require to be dealt with at any period of the year, even although the peak volume may last for but a comparatively short time. The impracticability of such an arrangement will be at once apparent, and much as we regret having from time to time to pay temporary employees off as the necessity for their employment ceases, it is impossible to see how, under present conditions, such action can be avoided if the business of the Department is to be run on economic lines. Other phases of this question are touched on in the portion of the report dealing with staff generally.

OUTPUT OF NEW ROLLING-STOCK.

The year ended 31st March, 1931, represented the second year of the programme of new and replacement rolling-stock that has been formulated, and can be said to constitute a record so far as output from the New Zealand Railway Workshops is concerned. While the volume of work undertaken during the year in question was high, partly on account of the accumulation of the previous year's unfinished programme, which year was spent in bringing the arrears of repairs up to date rather than in the completing of new rolling-stock, it has demonstrated the capacity of the workshops to meet the Department's requirements.