

STORES BRANCH

An analysis of the amount expended in connection with the purchase of stores during the year is as under :—

	Value of Purchases made, Year 1943.	Variation, 1943 with 1942.
	£	£
To merchants, manufacturers, and others in New Zealand ..	1,632,733	+646,437
Through Supply Liaison Officer in Australia ..	465,263	+272,110
Through High Commissioner in London	187,998	—222,903
Material manufactured in Railways workshops	339,891	+ 13,987
Coal and coke	979,326	+135,926
Manufactured and used material received from other branches, &c.	135,361	+ 22,564
Timber from Railways sawmill, and stores used	47,218	+ 5,847
Totals	3,787,790	+873,968*

* Net increase.

The increases in payments are due to the receipt of heavy shipments of munition materials.

The total issues to all branches (including coal) for the year amounted to £3,870,859, as against £3,120,190 for the previous year, an increase of £750,669.

PUBLICITY ACTIVITIES

Railways publicity has been curtailed to the limits prescribed by war conditions. As formerly, however, the public have been kept adequately informed of services and facilities made available by the Department, and the railway position regarding transport matters has been made known as required. Between the Department and the press generally, friendly liaison has been maintained, and I take this opportunity of expressing my appreciation of the consideration and assistance accorded to the Department in that relationship.

RAILWAYS AND THE WAR

The outstanding feature of the year has been the impact of war conditions on the country's transport system. With the severe disruption of other forms of transport due to the petrol and rubber shortages and to war conditions generally, it can now justly be said that in the transport sphere the railways form the foundation upon which all defence structures must rest. That the foundation is solid is evident from the results of the year's operation ; despite a considerably reduced staff the transport demands of the armed forces and of key industries have been met and services maintained to meet the essential civilian requirements of the country.

At times these demands have, however, been met only with great difficulty, and in view of the ever-increasing volume of traffic which the railways are being called upon to carry and having regard to the seriously depleted staff, it is clear that measures to ease the situation will have to be given very serious consideration in the immediate future. There appear to be only two alternatives, either the staff, particularly on the operating side, must be augmented or severe restrictions in railway services will have to be imposed.

As at 31st March, 1942, the number of railway employees serving with the armed forces totalled 6,876. Of these, 78 have been posted missing and 214 are known to be prisoners of war. The number of railwaymen who have made the supreme sacrifice in the present war now totals 168.

Contributions to the National Patriotic Fund by way of voluntary subscriptions deducted from the pay of railway employees have now reached the sum of £19,857, and in addition the staff have deposited by way of fortnightly instalments in National Savings Accounts the sum of £48,205.

TRACK, PLANT, AND ROLLING-STOCK

The track, bridges, structures, signalling appliances, rolling-stock, locomotives, and other plant are in good order and efficient for the work required of them.

STAFF

The following table shows the staff position, together with appropriate comparisons with the previous year's figures (the figures do not include the railway employees serving in the armed forces) :—

	1943.	1942.	Variation, 1943 with 1942.
Total staff as at 31st March—			
Permanent	12,647	13,124	— 477
Casual	9,903	9,128	+ 775
Totals	22,550	22,252	+ 298
Average staff throughout the year ended 31st March, 1943	22,237	23,352	—1,115