

kept under review, and members of this House and the public may rest assured that controls will be further relaxed as soon as the general position within the industry and its associated industries shows sufficient improvement to warrant that course.

Man-power available to the building and construction industry for both State and private works has increased by 7.1 per cent. during the past year, and it is also pleasing to report that the supply position in so far as most items are concerned has considerably improved. Cement and steel still remain in short supply. However, according to the latest information to hand from overseas the steel position is easing in the United Kingdom and the United States, but unfortunately the same cannot be said of Australia, our nearest source of supply. No effort has been spared by our representatives overseas in making known our requirements and also to have firm orders accepted for early delivery. There is a great disparity between the demand for and supply of cement from our local cement-works, and as an effort to bridge the gap to some considerable extent the Government has approved import licences for bulk supplies.

Following discussions with the Government the three local cement-manufacturing companies decided to increase the production capacity of their works. These works at present have a production potential of 275,000 tons per annum, and when the proposed extensions are completed the works will be capable of producing 450,000 tons per annum. Owing to the extreme difficulty of procuring the necessary plant from overseas and the amount of work involved it is not anticipated that there will be any increase in supply from the local works until the latter half of 1951 or early 1952. Until such time it will be necessary to continue importation of bulk supplies of cement, as only by this means will it be possible to make the tonnage available for consumption more comparable with the demand.

I am very gratified with the achievements under the State and State-subsidized works programme approved for the 1948-49 financial year. The necessity to ensure that works of the greatest urgency are undertaken in preference to those of a lower priority requires that the demands for works by all Departments are carefully investigated before being approved for inclusion in the works programme. The total expenditure on works of all classes, both capital and maintenance, during the past financial year was in the vicinity of 31.5 million pounds, the greatest expenditure being on housing, hydro-electric works, educational buildings, land-development, and highways, which, in accordance with Government policy, are given highest priority.

Many major works of national and local importance which as yet have not been commenced have received the Government's attention and at present are being investigated with a view to having them started immediately conditions permit.

During the year the Commissioner of Works, Mr. E. R. McKillop, was sent abroad by the Government for the purpose of obtaining assistance in regard to technical staff, man-power, and materials required to prosecute the Government's development programme. Mr. McKillop worked in conjunction with our High Commissioner's Office in London and with our Trade Commissioners in Washington and Montreal respectively.

The initial contacts made by him have since been followed up and have resulted in improvements in the material position, the supply of man-power by immigration, and additions to our technical staff.

Following the adoption by the Government of the Royal Commission's report on the Auckland Harbour Bridge proposal, Mr. McKillop was instructed to secure the services of an eminent firm of specialist bridge designers to proceed with the design of this bridge. The Government has been fortunate in securing the services of Messrs. Freeman, Fox, and Partners, of Westminster, the senior partner of the firm being Sir Ralph Freeman, who has had a life-long experience in the design of large bridges and