

SESSION II.
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NEW ZEALAND.

PUBLIC WORKS STATEMENT

BY THE HON. J. G. COATES, MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS.

MR. SPEAKER,—

In submitting my second Public Works Statement I have to announce a very different state of affairs to that which existed twelve months ago. Last year the work of my Department was delayed and rendered unusually expensive through scarcity of material and the difficulty of procuring suitable labour. The latter circumstance was due to the fact that almost all employers of labour, who had of necessity been restricted in their operations during the war, had launched out vigorously again on various necessary works. Consequently the Department had great difficulty in making the progress which was desired. A higher rate of wages, improved conditions of living on the works, more and better mechanical appliances, and the rearrangement and encouragement of the staff were factors which helped the Department to overcome the difficulties and maintain an improved rate of progress.

Conditions now are quite different. The supply of material and labour is considerably greater than funds will permit me to utilize. Still, the improvements in working-conditions and the reorganization that has proceeded should bear fruit. Wherever possible work is being carried out on the basis of payment by results, with appreciable benefit both to the workmen and to the Department.

Last year I announced that certain departmental reorganization was considered advisable to decentralize the administration as much as possible and place more direct responsibility on the District Engineers, with the object of expediting work. This policy has been put into operation, with marked improvement in administration.

A large quantity of labour-aiding machinery has now been installed with very beneficial results. So far the staff and workmen have not reached the maximum results, but already a very large improvement in output is apparent, and, as those directly engaged with the plant become more accustomed to the altered conditions which it brings about, still better results may be confidently anticipated.

Legislation has been framed with the object of improving the construction and maintenance of the arterial roads of the Dominion. This should occupy a prominent place in future legislation, as it is a subject that demands as urgent attention here as it is now receiving in practically all the most progressive countries in the world.