

The progressive development of our resources of electric power is an important factor both in our expanding economy and in the steady improvement of our living standards. During this financial year work will commence on the construction of a new power-station at Braeburn, in the Nelson district. Work is also continuing on the use of geothermal steam for the generation of electric power, which when developed will make a useful contribution to the requirements of the North Island.

The high level of demand for labour has been sustained and is matched by a high degree of industrial harmony throughout the country. My Minister of Labour is in constant touch with representatives of all sections of industry in efforts to promote understanding and agreement. It is highly satisfactory to be able to record that, since the waterfront strike in 1951, the output of work on the waterfront has increased by 25 per cent, notwithstanding a decrease of 1,000 in the number of registered workers. The Waterfront Industry Act, passed by Parliament last session, not only establishes Commission and Tribunal control of the industry on a permanent basis, but includes measures designed to improve the standard of amenities on the waterfront and to attract the best class of worker to the industry. My Government wishes to place on record its appreciation of the efforts of all sections of the industry during the past three years.

My Government will continue its policy of selective immigration so as to bring into the country in reasonable numbers people who can be readily assimilated and who are able to offer some worthwhile contribution towards our national development.

The vigorous action which followed the National Housing Conference held last year is an earnest of my Government's determination to deal with the housing problem. The new approach to this problem has yielded a record number of new houses during the financial year just ended and, in order to keep up the momentum, the present drive will be maintained.

It is a source of pleasure to my Ministers that a large proportion of our ex-servicemen of the Second World War has received assistance sufficient to complete their rehabilitation into civilian life. Total expenditure in this field now exceeds £180 million, of which more than £138 million has been advanced by way of loans. The sense of responsibility evinced by ex-servicemen in meeting their commitments is highly satisfactory and reflects the desire of these men to place their affairs on a sound basis. My Government appreciates the valuable services of those many persons who have assisted in various ways in meeting the needs of our ex-servicemen.

Consideration has been given to measures that can be adopted to improve the administration of our social services. A report has been submitted by the Consultative Committee on Hospital Reform, and their recommendations are now being studied.

During the past year the rates of benefits under the social security scheme have been reviewed. In general, increases of 10s. per week have been granted in respect of those benefits which are subject to an income qualification, while corresponding increases have also been made in the rates of war pensions and war veterans' allowances.

Recognizing that the welfare of the Maori people is of paramount importance, my Government has been giving special attention to land settlement, employment, education, health, and housing. Improvement in health and living standards has followed the provision of better houses, a record number of which has been made available to the Maori people during the past year. Prime importance is attached to the community aspects of Maori life and welfare, and in dealing with particular problems my Minister of Maori Affairs is concerned to see that close liaison with tribal executives is maintained,