

that nearly half a million of acres will be surveyed and available for sale during the current year under the different provisions of the Land Act will show honorable members that largely-increased facilities, as compared with previous years, are being afforded for settlement throughout the country.

Possibly the amount set aside for roads and bridges may seem needlessly large, seeing that the Government proposes to make special provision for works of this class; but it must be remembered that, owing to the necessity which has existed of extending the expenditure of the balance of our Public Works Fund over the interval until we can borrow again, a considerable number of the works authorized last year have not yet been commenced, but that nevertheless the localities interested look upon the grants as being still available; and there are, moreover, works still to be carried out upon such roads as the one from Christchurch to Hokitika, or that between Greymouth and Nelson, or upon the roads north of Auckland. Indeed, seeing that the portion of the colony lying north of Auckland is necessarily excluded from any further railway construction out of the loan now proposed, the Government deemed it only equitable to specially allocate for the roads, wharves, and bridges in that district the sum of £100,000. It is, however, the intention of the Government to afford no further assistance to local works otherwise than under the Bill proposed to be introduced, and it is hoped this class of expenditure will soon cease to be a charge upon our Public Works Fund.

With regard to works on the gold fields, the proposals of the Government, which have already been placed before the House in the ordinary Estimates, involve the expenditure out of the Consolidated Fund of an amount double that which has hitherto been placed upon the Estimates, and upon conditions which, it is believed, will cause the vote to be more largely availed of than has been the case heretofore.

In addition to the above sum from the Consolidated Fund, it is proposed to set aside £100,000 out of the new loan partly for the making of roads, and partly for the construction of water-races, to which the Government has been practically committed by the previous expenditure of considerable sums, the outlay upon which would be thrown away unless the works were carried on to completion.

The Government is sensible that in the past some of these works have been initiated upon estimates of cost which subsequent experience has proved to be entirely inadequate and fallacious, while in other cases the calculations as to the amount of paying ground to be served have been founded on insufficient data.

Reports have been obtained which will give to honorable members a tolerably correct view of the present position of the works in question.

On the Mikonui Water-race the construction of the section now in hand involves an expenditure of £20,000. This expenditure will be entirely useless unless the work is continued over a period of four years—the time which will be occupied in the construction of a tunnel on the line of race—and unless the work is carried on to a point involving more than quadruple the present outlay.

The Government considers that it would not be justified in abandoning the work if satisfactory assurance can be obtained, after careful inquiry, that it can be completed within the estimated cost and that the results likely to be attained are not overestimated. If this be so determined, it is desirable that the tunnel should be at once put in hand, and that no future doubt should overhang a question of such large interest to the people in the Ross District.

The case of the Nelson Creek Water-race is one which also will require further investigation before new works can be put in hand.

A sum of not less than £90,000 has been expended on works which, it appears, will only serve a limited extent of ground, and would have required very large expenditure on renewal and reconstruction of aqueducts if the extent of ground had been larger.

The question which now arises is, whether the head waters of the race, which are admirably constructed, and possess peculiar natural advantages, can be advantageously diverted so as to render a fresh area of ground available. This question will require very careful investigation before works are proceeded with.