

£725,663; so here, also, we are within our authorities to the extent of £190,874. Particulars of the year's expenditure are given in the tables attached to the Statement.

The annual expenditure for the last seven years has decreased steadily from £1,409,000 in 1883–84 to £410,700 in 1889–90. It was confidently expected by a large section of the community that any considerable diminution of the public-works expenditure would entail serious results on the commerce and industries of the colony; but, happily, these forebodings have not been realised. As shown by my honourable colleague the Premier, our power of production is increasing at an extraordinary rate, and the “unemployed,” who in 1886 numbered 1,300, have ceased as a body to exist. The enterprise and energy which in former years were devoted to the prosecution of public works have found fresh outlets in other directions equally profitable to the country.

Including the purchase of provincial and district railways, the total expenditure to the 31st March, 1890, on works and services throughout the colony chargeable to loan was £27,774,930, the principal items being railways, £15,028,353; roads, £3,552,999; water-races, £510,280; telegraphs, £590,356; buildings, £1,757,965; lighthouses and harbour-works and harbour-defences, £879,152; immigration, £2,143,327; purchase of Native lands, £1,178,554; cost of raising loans, £1,021,472; defence, £429,719; and departmental, £341,905.

As regards railways, harbour-works, and harbour-defences, these may be considered works of a special character, beyond the ordinary operations of settlement, and which cannot well be carried out without borrowed capital; and the purchase of Native lands and the construction of roads in connection therewith are fair charges on the land revenue; but the cost of ordinary roads, telegraphs, public buildings, lighthouses, and other less important works, hitherto charged to loan, must in future be charged to the Consolidated Fund. I should also add another item, which does not appear separately in the tables—namely, improvements on open lines of railway. This is an aspect of the question that I would like to impress on the attention of honourable members, for in the natural desire to lighten the burden of taxation it is frequently overlooked.

With regard to the balance of Public Works Funds still available, it is our intention to expend it for the purposes for which it was borrowed, making it carry us on to the end of next year.

In accordance with the policy of economy which the Government has systematically pursued, it is proposed to proceed with all classes of public works in a very cautious manner, compared with the high rate of speed to which we have been accustomed; and, as already shown, the experience of the last year or two proves that the slowing-down process is not retarding the progress of the country.

Speaking generally, we propose to expend all the available funds for railways in completing lines to convenient termini. Our proposals with reference to the individual lines and other works will be stated further on under their respective heads.

The following is an abstract of the state of the Public Works Fund on the 31st March last, and an estimate of what it will be on the 31st March next:—

	Part I.	Part II.	Part III.	Total.
	£	£	£	£
Cash balances on 31st March, 1890	233,675	386,985	426,806	1,047,466
Amount proposed for actual expenditure during 1890–91	184,284	108,800	230,888	523,972
Estimated cash balances on 31st March, 1891, available for expenditure after that date ...	49,391	278,185	195,918	523,494
Cash balances on 31st March, 1890	233,675	386,985	426,806	1,047,466
Total appropriation proposed for expenditure during 1890–91, and to cover liabilities at end of year ...	242,275	191,544	310,719	744,538
Estimated balance on 31st March, 1891, available for future appropriation	Dr. 8,600	195,441	116,087	302,928