

1895.

NEW ZEALAND

PUBLIC WORKS STATEMENT,

BY THE MINISTER FOR PUBLIC WORKS, THE HON R. J. SEDDON

21ST OCTOBER, 1895.

MR. SPEAKER,—

It has fallen to my lot to be the first Minister for Public Works in this colony who has had the honour of presenting five consecutive Public Works Statements to the House. It is, however, with some misgiving that I now lay before you my fifth Statement, knowing full well that, owing to the small amount available for public works, disappointment is sure to be occasioned. The exceptional circumstances which have arisen this session will, I hope, be a sufficient extenuation for the presentation of this Statement at so late a period of the session. The banking legislation, the consideration of which occupied practically four weeks, delayed the consideration of the tariff proposals, and these in their turn impeded the passing of the Consolidated Fund estimates, and it was impossible, until our finance was assured, to bring down the Public Works Statement.

The Colonial Treasurer, in the Financial Statement, mentioned the amount available for public works, and honourable members are thus aware that a reduction in the expenditure upon public works has become imperative. The moneys under Part II. are nearly exhausted, and this year we are only able to transfer £150,000 from the Consolidated Fund for general public works purposes. As the ways and means are thus very limited, attractiveness in the Statement is out of the question.

Employers of labour, owing to the low prices of our staple products and other causes, reduced their expenditure during the winter considerably, thus throwing a very large number of men out of employment. This contingency, although neither unforeseen nor unexpected, placed an extra strain upon the local authorities as well as upon the Government, for the men and those dependent upon them could not be allowed to want. In the localities where the "unemployed" difficulty was most acute the local authorities and the general public, I am pleased to say, assisted materially in providing for the most necessitous cases. But even with this assistance the demands upon the Government were very great, and, under the circumstances, the expenditure during the past year under Part I. was not unreasonable, and may indeed be said to be very satisfactory.

A RETROSPECT

Honourable members will, I hope, not consider it out of place for me to refer to the past. On reference to the Public Works Statement of 1891, it will be found, under the head of "Public Works Fund," that the sum of £718,096 was then available for public works purposes, with liabilities against it to the amount of £240,387. Of this amount, £356,107 belonged to Part II., which is "ear-marked" money, available for the North Island Main Trunk Railway only