

I had the honour to be intrusted with the charge of the Public Works Department at a time when the Public Works Fund was at a lower ebb than it had ever been since its initiation. The amount to the credit of Part I. of the Fund on the 31st March, 1895, was £268,526. During the year £150,000 was transferred from the Consolidated Fund, as proposed in the Financial Statement of last year, and sundry credits also came to book to the amount of £2,272, bringing the total of this part of the Fund up to £420,798. The expenditure amounted to £389,648, leaving a credit balance at the end of the year of £31,150 only. On Part II. the balance at 31st March, 1895, was £26,604, and £10,000 (being receipts in respect of land purchased out of the North Island Main Trunk Railway Loan) was transferred to credit during the year, thus bringing the total amount up to £36,604. The expenditure amounted to £22,681, leaving a balance on the 31st March last of £13,923, or a total balance available on the whole Public Works Fund of £45,073. There was also £31,425 to the credit of the Lands Improvement Account, and £5,920 to the credit of the Native Lands Purchase Account, and in addition to these amounts there was authority for the creation of further debentures on these two accounts to the extent of £21,200 on the former, and £30,800 on the latter, so that the gross total ways and means available amounted to £134,418. It was well understood by all parties in the colony that additional funds would be required in aid of public works, the only doubtful point being whether the Government would ask Parliament for a large sum sufficient to complete the North Island Trunk, the Otago Central, the Midland, the Thames—Te Aroha, the Woodville—Eketahuna, and other railways, or whether they would merely ask for aid to a limited amount, so as to permit the several works to be proceeded with for the present at the existing rate of expenditure. All doubts were set at rest when my colleague the Colonial Treasurer brought down the Financial Statement, in which it was set forth that aid to the extent of only one million was recommended; and on the whole this proposal has been favourably received. There are some, I admit, who are opposed to extraneous aid in any shape being procured; but, seeing that by the Public Works Appropriation Act of last session Parliament had authorised the expenditure on public works to proceed for three months of the current year at the same rate as that voted for last year, it was surprising and disappointing to find any opposition to the raising of the moneys required to pay for the works authorised, or for their continuance, for it would have been unreasonable to expect that all works should be stopped on the 30th of June, thus throwing out of work, in the dead of winter, some two to three thousand men.

I am pleased, however, to be able to congratulate the House on having now made adequate provision for the present for carrying on the important aids to colonisation provided for under our public-works policy. Under the legislation of the present session the following additional sums will be made available, namely:—

For Railways	...	...	...	...	...	£250,000
For Development of Goldfields	...	...	...	...	...	200,000
For Development of Thermal Springs and Natural Scenery	...	...	...	...	...	50,000
For the Lands Improvement Account	...	...	...	...	...	250,000
For the Native Lands Purchase Account	...	...	...	...	...	250,000
Total	...	...	...	...	...	<u>£1,000,000</u>

It is also proposed to transfer from revenue to the credit of the Public Works Fund £150,000; and about £20,000 will also probably come to credit from other sources. Adding to these amounts the balances remaining on the 31st March last—namely, £134,418—there will be a gross total sum available of £1,304,418. The liabilities on the 31st March last were £320,636: after providing for the same there is left the sum of £983,782, being the largest sum available for public works during the last five years. This may lead to expectations being raised that an increased expenditure on public works will eventuate. Those who expect this will be doomed to disappointment, inasmuch as the Government have no intention whatever to largely increase the expenditure on