

REARRANGEMENT OF DEPARTMENTS.

In the Public Works Statement of last year my predecessor suggested a scheme for the reallocation of work between the Public Works, Railway, and Lands Departments. The matter is, however, not entirely free from difficulty, and, although a good deal of consideration was given to it during last recess, no final decision on the subject has yet been arrived at. It is still thought that some improvement in administration can be effected by a rearrangement of duties between the departments mentioned, and further consideration will be given to the matter after the close of the session.

To guard against any possibility of conflict or difference of opinion arising between the Public Works and Railway Departments, I have arranged with my colleague the Minister for Railways for the Chief Engineer for Working Railways to confer with the Engineer-in-Chief, and for these two officers to carefully review the whole of the standard drawings, and to arrange for future works to be carried out in accordance with the strong points of the present drawings of both departments, and for one uniform standard to be adopted for all works. I have also arranged that the Public Works officers shall consult the Railway officers before executing any work for the latter department, also that all plans and specifications for new railway-works shall be submitted to the Railway Department for approval before such work is put in hand, so as to insure that the work when carried out may be such as will fully meet the requirements and convenience of the latter department. With these safeguards, the House will, I am sure, concur with me in thinking that the work of railway construction may safely and conveniently be left with the Public Works Department—the department which, in any case, must maintain a strong engineering and constructive staff to enable it to carry out the many other important works which will be under its control.

INSPECTION OF MACHINERY.

The Inspection of Machinery Act, honourable members are aware, is now administered by the Public Works Department. The work has been ably and efficiently carried on during the year, and the very full report of the Chief Inspector appears as an appendix to this Statement. I deeply regret to have to report the decease of the late Mr. W. M. Mowatt, who filled the position of Chief Inspector from 30th June, 1892, to the date of his death on 31st January, 1896. The late Mr. Mowatt was an able, zealous, and conscientious officer, and the Government had full confidence in the administration of this branch of the department being well and economically conducted while it was under his charge. In filling the vacancy it was determined to offer the appointment to one of the Inspectors already in the service of the department, and Mr. Robert Duncan, the principal Inspector for the Otago District, was selected for the position. Mr. Duncan entered on his new duties in March last, and has already shown marked fitness for the position, and I have every confidence that the administration of the department will be as well conducted in the future as it has been in the past.

NEW LEGISLATION.

A Bill has already been passed by the Legislative Council to amend the Inspection of Machinery Acts in sundry particulars, and to somewhat enlarge their scope by subjecting to the operation of the Acts certain classes of machinery not hitherto included. The Bill is now before the House, and will, I trust, shortly be passed into law.

A Bill to amend the Public Works Act has also been prepared, and will be introduced immediately. The Bill is for the most part intended to grant additional powers in connection with the working of our railways; but, at the same time, certain improved provisions regarding public-works administration are proposed.

RAILWAYS.

Our expenditure on railway-works has been kept within very narrow limits during the last few years. The railway expenditure during each of the five-yearly periods since the initiation of the public-works policy has been as follows:—