

the expense will exceed the amount calculated upon when this Parliament passed the Pacific Cable Act last year. An amending Act to meet the altered conditions will be necessary.

Our proportionate share will not be much, but it will be necessary for us to be in a position as contracting parties to fulfil our engagements. It will not, however, be necessary to take a vote on the main estimates; at the same time, I deemed it desirable to draw attention to this most desirable undertaking and our responsibilities in connection therewith.

PUBLIC HEALTH.

It is a matter for sincere congratulation that this colony so far has virtually escaped a visit from that dreadful scourge the bubonic plague. To the less fortunate colonies in which the plague has appeared, and more particularly to the relatives of those who have succumbed to the dread disease, our utmost sympathy is heartily extended.

Legislation and administration of a somewhat drastic character became a necessity, and both the local authorities and the General Government have been called upon to expend considerable sums of public moneys.

The expenditure being for the preservation of public health, and on precautionary measures and sanitation, all right-thinking persons will not object, but must admit that the result will be to reduce the death-rate, and free many parts of the colony from a danger ever present under the conditions that obtained some time ago.

The legislation of the past respecting the public health was cumbersome, and lacking in necessary powers, and the division of responsibility rendered it unworkable.

It is proposed to bring into existence a Health Department, with full powers and responsibilities, and it will follow in natural sequence that a slight increased charge must fall upon the taxpayers; but it is better to bear with this than to have plague, diseases, death, and sorrow.

The Minister of Public Health will place before you the proposed expenditure consequent on the passing of the necessary legislation.

MIDLAND RAILWAY.

This long-pending dispute has, so far as the law respecting the same is concerned, been finally settled, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council having decided in favour of the colony. A review of the case at this juncture is not out of place.

The colony was forced to arbitration to meet claims amounting to over one million sterling, the finding being in our favour. Proceedings were then taken against the Government with a view of ousting it from possession.

The decision of the Supreme Court was in favour of the Government, the Appeal Court upheld the decision of the Supreme Court, and, as previously stated, the Privy Council has upheld the decision of the Appeal Court.

The litigation has been tedious and costly, but that is compensated for in the full vindication of the honour of the colony. Leaving the Minister for Public Works and myself out of the question, I take this opportunity of stating that the colony is greatly indebted to the Crown Solicitors, and Mr. H. D. Bell, also to the Under-Secretary of the Public Works Department, Mr. Blow, for the very able manner in which the proceedings on behalf of the colony have been conducted. The one great regret and irreparable loss has been the retarding of settlement in Canterbury, Nelson, and Westland, owing to the lands within the prescribed area being locked up practically for ten years, and the delay in the completion of the railway; in fact, so far as the colony is concerned, beyond the fragmentary pieces of lines completed, it has been great loss and little gain.

The debenture-holders have now petitioned Parliament. They are within their rights in so doing, and no objection can be taken thereto. The petition is now before the Public Accounts Committee, and any further reference to the matter would be out of place.