

1901.

NEW ZEALAND.

PUBLIC WORKS STATEMENT

BY THE HON. W. HALL-JONES, MINISTER FOR PUBLIC WORKS,
22ND OCTOBER, 1901.

MR. SPEAKER,—

It is with feelings of pleasure that I lay before honourable members my sixth Statement, especially as it has not fallen to the lot of any one of my predecessors to deliver six consecutive Public Works Statements.

The work undertaken last year was of a more extensive character than during any of the past few years, and the total expenditure consequently reached a higher figure. A large amount of very useful work has been accomplished, and the extent to which the improved conveniences are appreciated by our settlers is well evidenced by the demands made for further road, railway, and other facilities. Indeed, had these demands been complied with to anything like their full extent the estimates of expenditure which I submit this evening would have been swelled to twice their present dimensions.

In dealing with the question of expenditure upon public works, it is well to remember that it is only just over sixty years since New Zealand became a British colony; and when honourable members bear in mind that at that time there were no roads, railways, or bridges, no telegraphic communication, no post-offices or other public buildings; that education, beyond that supplied by the missionaries, was practically unknown; and the islands were only visited at rare intervals by sailing-ships, it must be admitted that the progress made since that time has been most satisfactory, and establishes a record of which we may justly be proud. Two thousand two hundred and twelve miles of railway have been constructed and opened for traffic, thousands of miles of road have been formed, hundreds of bridges built, 7,250 miles of telegraph-lines established; the necessary public buildings (including schools) have been erected at great cost; and a large fleet of ships are now engaged in carrying to all parts of the world the products of our enterprising settlers.

While this good work has been done during past years, we who for the time being have the welfare of the country intrusted to our charge must not ignore our responsibilities in seeing that steps are taken for the further development of our colony, and that every opportunity is thus afforded for our settlers to forward their products to the markets of the world at the lowest possible cost and in the shortest reasonable time. To enable this to be done, notwithstanding what pessimists may say, we must continue our policy of road- and railway-construction. We must further improve our existing lines of communication; and this, done with due regard to economy, will result in placing our country in a still more satisfactory position. Without proper means of communication our settlers are hampered and handicapped; and it is our duty to remove the disabilities under which they labour, bearing in mind that as the work progresses each mile of railway completed and each chain of road formed is so much towards the end we have in view.

i—D. 1.