

EDUCATION.

Much solid progress has been accomplished in regard to the work of education during the past year. The passing of the Secondary Schools Act, the National Scholarships Act, and the issue of the carefully revised syllabus of instruction in public schools, mark an important era in the educational history of our colony.

The large majority of the secondary schools have complied with the Government's scheme for free secondary education; the governing bodies of some secondary institutions, however, have declined to make the necessary provision for free places as required under the Act, and Parliament will be asked to deal with this phase of the situation. Only by compliance with the conditions laid down can full advantage be taken of the money derived from public educational endowments.

A liberal vote will be asked for this year in respect to school buildings, technical education, and the payment of scholarship fees. The total amount spent on school buildings last year was £116,614.

It is the Government's desire to meet as far as possible the requirements of education in the back blocks and newly settled districts. In many cases unavoidable delay in dealing with such applications often occurs owing to the necessity for inquiry and investigation; but Parliament will be asked to provide a liberal vote for these special cases.

During the recess an additional amount of £5,000 was authorised in connection with the erection of the Victoria College buildings, thus making a total grant of £25,000 towards this purpose. It is satisfactory to note that after considerable delay plans for the buildings have been approved and a tender accepted.

The requirements of an intelligent democracy entail a liberal expenditure in respect of its educational system, and members will not, I feel sure, begrudge the amounts allocated for this very necessary purpose.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR.

The prosperous condition of the colony has lightened one branch of the Department's work—namely, the superintendence of "unemployed" transport. The number of men applying for work was comparatively few, and the difficulty of meeting the applications easier than formerly, notwithstanding the steady and continued influx of workers from Australia. Labour was sometimes scarce and costly in the country districts, while the skilled trades in town received unusually high rates of remuneration.

The duties of the Inspectors of Awards have been heavy, and occupy much time and attention. In the year 1903 the cases brought before the Court numbered 120, and there are still about 150 waiting hearing. Few of these cases are industrial disputes, but are mainly for breaches of award, thus showing how necessary the appointment of Inspectors of Awards was in the interest of the operative classes.

The expenses incurred by the Department in bringing these cases are reimbursed to a very large extent by the costs awarded by the Court.

Factories increased in number beyond the annual average, 758 new factories, employing 4,598 workers, being added to those enumerated in last report. Over £2,000 has been collected in factory fees, a sum in itself sufficient to meet the cost of administration.

Assertions are sometimes made that the wages of workers have unduly increased of late years. Answering these I would point to the large expansion of business which has taken place, and the increased values of property in the colony. In Wellington City alone the capital values have risen from £5,865,778 in 1891 to £10,935,689 in 1903; while £3,000,000 of this increase has been added in the last five years. The rating value of the four chief towns in New Zealand is now £27,972,747. These facts, taken together with the advances in the price of commodities, fully justify any advance in the wages of workers caused by the carefully considered awards of the Arbitration Court.