

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—You said there were four or five hundred unemployed in Christchurch alone.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—I will undertake to prove that that is under the mark.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—From the information given to me they do not reach any thing like that. Out of the 220,000 workers in this Dominion I will undertake to say there are not two thousand who in the strict sense are unemployed. I am as anxious to help legitimately in this matter as I am sure every other honourable member of the House is; but the fact remains that the percentage of unemployed as compared with the total number of workers is less in New Zealand than in any other country in the world. I want to say that we recognise there is a certain percentage of unemployment, and we regret it, but I regret also to have the assumption conveyed that because of something we are prepared to do for the defence of the Empire to which we belong we are going to accentuate the amount of unemployment. I say it is going to do nothing of the kind. Even if a loan had to be raised to enable road and railway works to be gone on with for the purpose of affording relief to the unemployed, the House will recognise that under normal conditions the legislation for that purpose could not have been passed before the end of October, so that this suggestion that there is going to be something injurious by the delay owing to the prorogation of Parliament is a mistaken one, and I think it is my duty to point this out to honourable members. We have to make provision in the direction of a loan Bill and obtaining our ordinary supply. One word about the question of retrenchment which has been referred to by some honourable gentlemen. I regret the necessity for retrenchment, and I think every right-thinking person in the country must do so. It has been urged by many people in New Zealand. However, that is beside the question; but the Government wanted to study the necessities of those who were going out, because it was felt that where they were going out they would require naturally some assistance to enable them to have the means of a decent living. We have already considered that, and marked out a course to pursue. It was not my intention to mention it at this stage, but, as these side-issues have been introduced, it becomes my duty to make a statement of what we have in contemplation. What we have already decided is that in every case of persons going out of the service we give him the advantage of either three months' pay or of keeping him on for three months—until practically the winter is over. We decided also to acquire an area of land in both Islands to be devoted to retiring members of the Civil service, especially men with families who are not in receipt of a superannuation of over £75 a year. I feel that those who are superannuated and are getting over £75 a year are at least in a position of being enabled to look around with the view of obtaining employment or of tiding over things in the ordinary way. I believe that absolutely the only way in which you can give some relief to a number of people who through the exigencies that have arisen must be dispensed with is to give them the opportunity of getting on a suitable piece of land, and we will give financial help to a reasonable extent for providing a house for those who can go on the land. Now, we are proposing to do that in both Islands, both in the North Island and in the South Island, and I am quite confident that in the course I have suggested, with a reasonable application and a little consideration even from those who differ from us, we shall carry that policy out successfully, and that many a man, and woman too, who through matters beyond their own control as well as ours have lost the positions they formerly held—and which sometimes require to be abolished, because we cannot in the public service of this country continue more people in the Departments than there is proper and legitimate employment for—will receive the benefit. That is the course we are following, and intend to follow, and that is a course which I think will be recognised as an honest effort to try and deal with a problem which is of very great importance to many people, and who without such a policy would in some instances suffer. We are also carrying out the same policy to workers with families, and have already provided for about two hundred families along the North Island Trunk line in this way, and we will continue to do so. As the question of general defence has arisen in this matter, let me say a word or two on that. I did not contemplate the necessity of having to say anything about it at present. I was under the impression that I made it quite clear, when I spoke in Invercargill some time ago, that the Government in the coming session intended to legislate on the question of internal defence. I do not think the time opportune, nor would it be expedient for me at present to attempt to go into the details of what we propose to do. There are some people in New Zealand whose efforts I have admired, who are endeavouring to educate the people, and to try and bring about an improved feeling with a view to having a better system of internal defence, and I am strongly in favour of the people being educated in that way. But I want to say that the Government proposals that will be submitted to Parliament next session will, I believe, meet the expectations of the country, and I also believe that they will meet with the support of every reasonable member of Parliament. We have to go into the matter of the defence of New Zealand, and I want to say advisedly in this connection that we cannot have in this country an annual expenditure of one million a year for internal defence. Our population is too small, and we have in considering the position to recognise that our exigencies with regard to internal defence must be subordinated to a reasonable expenditure, though that expenditure may be increased, and that will be proposed by the Government on lines that will be a considerable improvement on what we are doing now. When you have those proposals placed before you, all I ask is that you should judge each one fairly and impartially, and help us to improve them where it is thought they might be improved. That is the only fair thing to do and what I now want to say with regard to this particular matter. Another subject alluded to by an honourable member was the question of the financial position of New Zealand itself. I want to say that the Government recognise that something ought to be done to further assist private people who want money in New Zealand. We realise that, as the outcome of the very heavy drop in wool, the dislocation of the flax-market, and subsequently to that the drop in the frozen-meat market, the margins of the securities of some people in New Zealand are not so large as they were a year or two ago.