

1917.
NEW ZEALAND.

PUBLIC WORKS STATEMENT,

BY THE HON. WILLIAM FRASER, MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS.

MR. SPEAKER,—

When I prepared my Public Works Statement last year I was under the impression that I would be able to expend within the financial year the most of the money I was asking Parliament to vote for road and bridges. Acting on this belief I authorized for expenditure the whole of this sum to either the local bodies or to my District Engineers on the basis of one-half of the unauthorized items on the estimates for each county.

Owing, however, to the impossibility of obtaining sufficient labour, I was unable to secure the expenditure of much more than one-half of the sum so authorized. The result is that from the sum I now propose asking Parliament to vote for roads and bridges—viz., £420,000—I have first to deduct £60,000 for the flood-damage vote, and then the unexpended authorities issued prior to the 31st March, 1917, amounting to £195,000. This will leave £165,000, which will be only sufficient to provide for about one-half of those items on last year's estimates which were not authorized, and also enable a few of the most urgent new applications to be dealt with.

If the war continues for another twelve months it can hardly be expected of me that I shall be able to expend the whole of the money proposed to be appropriated for roads and bridges ; still, I consider it advisable that I should be empowered to meet any contingency that may arise.

The extraordinary and continuous rainfall that has been experienced over the greater part of the North Island during the last twelve months has caused an enormous amount of damage to roads and bridges. The country became water-logged, and wherever the roads had not been metalled they were quite unable to bear any traffic and soon became quagmires, causing very serious inconvenience. I have endeavoured as far as it lay in my power to assist in repairing this damage, but the loss accruing from this deluge of rain has been very serious.