

SESSION II.
1918.
NEW ZEALAND.

PUBLIC WORKS STATEMENT,

BY THE HON. SIR WILLIAM FRASER, KT. BACH.,
MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS.

MR. SPEAKER,—

The difficulty I anticipated of being able to procure a sufficient supply of labour whilst the war lasted was, I regret to say, only too manifest during last year. Indeed, as time went on it became increasingly accentuated. The fact that on the 31st March, 1918, the unexpended authorities in the hands of local bodies and of the officers of my Department amounted to £209,962 for roads and bridges alone clearly proves that it was the scarcity of labour and material, and not of money, which accounted for only £135,642 having been expended during the financial year on such work.

Happily the war is now brought to a victorious conclusion, but a considerable period must almost necessarily elapse before we can hope to see any appreciable number of our soldiers back in New Zealand. Should this period prove to be shorter than is at present anticipated I have made ample provision, both on the estimates and in the Public Works Fund, to ensure that work will be available for all who need it. In the meantime no appreciable increase of rate of expenditure can be expected.

I regret to say that the damage caused to roads and bridges by flood during the past year has again been very serious. In every instance, however, substantial assistance has been given to the local bodies whose districts were affected.

The financial results for the past year from the operations of the Lake Coleridge electric works are particularly satisfactory. Notwithstanding the fact that this undertaking is still incomplete the revenue earned during the year from the sale of electric power has more than sufficed to defray all costs of administration, including interest on capital outlay, as well as providing a portion of the amount required to be set aside for a depreciation fund.

This work has passed beyond the experimental stage, and is now an exceedingly valuable asset. The above result is an object-lesson as to what may be expected from similar undertakings in other parts of the Dominion.

The sum of £150,000 is provided for initiatory work on the proposed Auckland and Wellington schemes, details of which will be found in the Chief Electrical Engineer's special report on this subject.