

has been experienced in obtaining accurate information as to the amount collected by ordinary rates in the several Municipalities and Road Board Districts; but it will be tolerably safe to assume that the rates levied during the past year, upon which it is proposed to pay this contribution, were in the Municipalities a little under £55,000, and in the Road Board Districts a little under £50,000. But as our information is not quite reliable, I have thought it better to ask for £80,000 for the eight months, which will certainly cover all eventualities.

CLASS XII.—PROVINCIAL SERVICES FOR EIGHT MONTHS.

Believing that Parliament will decide this Session to abolish the Provincial form of Government throughout New Zealand, I have to ask the Committee to make proper provision for carrying on all necessary departments now under the control of the Provincial Governments. This could be done in several ways. I might have submitted to the Committee detailed estimates of all the Provincial Departments, but there are obvious objections to such a course upon first abolishing the Provincial Governments; or I might have asked the House to have permitted the present Provincial Appropriation Acts to remain in force, and to have given authority to continue the services at the same rates for such period as might elapse between the date of the expiry of the several Acts and the 30th June next. But, looking at all the circumstances of the case, the Government have thought it better to ask for the vote in its present shape. The totals are arrived at by taking two-thirds of the amount voted in the last Provincial Appropriation Acts for the services chargeable on ordinary revenue as now existing, but excluding Legislative and Political Executive Departments. The expenditure for Lands and Surveys is, under the Abolition Bill, made a charge upon the Land Fund, and it is proposed to continue to charge against that fund the departmental services for local public works. The advantages of this mode of procedure are apparent. It immediately brings under the knowledge and control of this House the total expenditure required for the services to be taken over, while it insures the continuance of the several departments until the Government have had an opportunity of seeing where and how they may be advantageously consolidated. The Government is anxious to consolidate offices, and to reduce expenditure; but they will be very careful that no reductions shall be made which will at all impair the efficiency of the public service.

Honorable members will also observe that there is a proposed vote for £60,000 for local public works in out-districts. This will enable us to carry out the intentions of the Provincial Governments with regard to many necessary works in districts which have hitherto received but scant justice. Ordinarily these works would be charged upon Land Fund, but this year, in consideration of the possible inequalities incident to the proposed changes, we have thought it fair to charge it on revenue, and it will therefore be in addition to the expenditure provided for out of Land Fund.

Before passing on, there is one service, hitherto under provincial control, which I desire specially to mention—and that is Education. It is because the Government recognize the subject as of vital importance and of general—that is, colonial—concern, that they desire to feel their way most carefully before moving in it. Education is now being carried on more or less successfully throughout the colony: the Government desire not to alter until they are satisfied they can improve. For the present year, therefore, we propose, as to administration, to leave things practically as they are, seeing, however, that proper provision is made where it is now wanting.

The Government are of opinion that Education is properly a charge upon our ordinary income, but, in order to guard against the imposition of an excessive burden upon the Consolidated Fund, it is proposed, for the present year, to ask for authority to defray this charge, if necessary, out of Land Fund. The valuable educational reserves already made in several of the provinces will, of course, remain subject to their present trusts, and reserves of a similar nature will be made in other districts, where practicable.

In many parts of the colony there is no proper provision for school buildings.