

1916.
NEW ZEALAND.

PUBLIC WORKS STATEMENT,

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

MR. SPEAKER.—

When the Public Works Statement of 1915-16 was being discussed by the House I made it quite clear that I had no intention of expending during that financial year the whole of the moneys which I was asking Parliament to entrust to me. On the contrary, I expressed my determination to endeavour to distribute the expenditure of these moneys over a period of two years instead of over one year. That I have succeeded in this endeavour is proved by the fact that after expending (inclusive of the cost of raising loan) £2,344,944 out of the Public Works Fund, I had still to the credit of that fund on 31st March, 1916, the sum of £1,838,201—viz., cash, £1,293,101; and balance of authorized loan-money still to be raised, £545,100. I feel confident that I am expressing the opinion of the whole community that this sum should suffice for the needs of the current year as far as public works are concerned, and the estimates are framed on that basis. To ensure this result the estimates for roads and bridges for 1916-17 will consist only of the unexpended votes on the estimates for 1915-16. To prevent misapprehension let me here state that the Public Works loan of £1,000,000 authorized under the Finance Bill, now before the House, is not intended to provide any further money for roads, bridges, railways, &c., during the current year; but some portion of it will be available, if necessary, to continue expenditure on such works from 31st March, 1917, until Parliament meets again, by which time we all hope and trust that peace will have been proclaimed. The provision I am making for roads and bridges is only about £4,500 less than what I expended last year, but the provision for railway expenditure has had in consequence to be reduced by £200,000.

Owing to the foregoing reasons I have been unable to make any provision on the estimates for applications for new grants for roads and bridges. I propose, however, to partially overcome this difficulty in the following manner: I am taking power in the Appropriation Act to transfer the sums now allocated on this year's estimates for such roads and bridges which a local body may deem of minor importance to other more urgently needed works which do not appear on the said estimates, but are situated in the same county; thus in reality providing money for new works. This will, I feel confident, help to meet the views of many local bodies.