

1874.

NEW ZEALAND.

PUBLIC WORKS STATEMENT,

BY THE MINISTER FOR PUBLIC WORKS, THE HON. EDWARD RICHARDSON.

MR. SPEAKER,—

I propose in this Statement to endeavour to give to the House, as fully and clearly as circumstances will allow, an account of the proceedings of the Public Works Department during the year that has just closed. In so doing, I venture to hope that the House will share in the conviction that as much work has been put in hand as it was to the advantage of the country should be undertaken. Some few of the works contemplated last year have been allowed to remain in abeyance; but this has mainly arisen from the fact that the further forcing on of public works would have produced an unwise competition between the Government and private employers of labour, and by checking industrial enterprise have brought about results which would have been very unfavourable to the colony.

I think it right, Sir, to state—not by way of apology, but for the information of the House—that the delay caused by the unexampled prosperity of the country, and the very great demand for labour produced thereby, has been increased by the numerical insufficiency of the professional staff. While every endeavour has been made to remedy this, there has been no period during the year when the staff was sufficient to meet the requirements of the department. As I have referred to delay in carrying out some of the works, it is necessary for me to remind Members that the expenditure during the year has been larger, and therefore the rate at which the works are progressing has been quicker than was originally contemplated when the construction of railways was proposed. My observations as to delay must be considered in connection with the fact that larger works within the year have been demanded than was at first intended.

Honorable members will find on reference to the Estimates that the increase made in the staff has been considerable, and that provision is made for a still larger increase. Very serious difficulty has been found in procuring Engineers who have had experience in railway surveying and construction. This difficulty was greater, owing to the unprecedented general prosperity of the colony enabling the several provinces to undertake many large works; the provinces, together with the numerous Road Boards and private companies also carrying out large works, were employing the best professional skill they could obtain.

Many works have been retarded for want of Engineers, and, I regret to say, in one or two instances it would have been better to have waited longer rather than employ those whom we did employ. It was deemed absolutely necessary to send to England for several Engineers, and during the past few weeks seven have arrived. These gentlemen have been distributed by the Engineer-in-Chief over