

have been made, it is necessary, in order to institute a fair comparison between the votes of last year and the proposed votes for the current year, that these abatements should be treated as if they had not been made.

The amount voted by the House for the services of last year was £2,066,706. The Estimates for the current year amount to £2,015,802; but adding the abatements for recoveries, amounting to £55,843, to which I have referred, they amount to £2,071,645, being £4,939 more than the amount voted last year. I should explain, however, that the Estimates of last year included a sum of £50,000 for Harbour Defences, which we do not propose to re-vote out of revenue; but we shall ask the House to vote out of the Public Works Fund such a sum as we are likely to require for this purpose during the current year. The real increase in the Estimates for this year is, therefore, £54,939.

That is the net result. I shall not weary the Committee by going into a lengthy comparison of the two years' estimates, but I should like to draw attention to one or two prominent items. In the vote for Railways there is an increase of £73,647, partly due to increased traffic on the lines and partly to the extension of the mileage open, there being now 1,407 miles, as against 1,358 last year; and in the vote for Armed Constabulary there is a decrease of £13,226, our improved relations with the Natives on the West Coast having enabled the Government to effect a reduction in the number of men in the field force.

The vote for Hospitals and Charitable Aid has been increased by £16,000. The total charge on this account is now £83,900. Some districts, recognizing the truth that it is more blessed to give than to receive, still continue to subscribe to the local hospitals and benevolent societies; but the general tendency, I am sorry to say, is to more and more throw the whole burden of relieving the poor upon the State. The comfort and well-being in the future of the great body of the people of this country so much depends upon the way in which we may decide to deal with this important question, and public opinion is so unformed upon the subject, that, notwithstanding the many evident objections to our present system, the Government have determined to ask for a continuance of the vote in its present shape, thus leaving the question comparatively open to be dealt with when the matter has been more carefully considered. Sir, there seems to me to be insuperable objections to a poor-law in any shape. I believe such a law not only to be unnecessary, but highly demoralizing to any community that adopts it. The Government are not, therefore, prepared to submit any law having for its object to charge the cost of maintaining the indigent upon local or general rates. But, with the view of helping to form public opinion upon the subject, I shall ask leave to lay upon the table of the House a Bill for compulsory National Insurance, not with the intention of asking the House to read it a second time, but with the hope of getting a debate upon it, and then distributing the Bill throughout the country for public consideration.

Honourable members will see, upon examining the Estimates, that the whole of the salaries remain the same as those voted last year, except in the case of cadets—who rise from £50 or £60 to £80 or £90 a year according to scale—those officers who are classified, and some half-dozen extraordinary cases, for which special reasons will be given by Ministers in charge of the department in which increases are made. The reason why no increases have been made is, not that the Government think none are fair or necessary, but because of the difficulty through want of classification, and the differences in pay of officers doing practically the same work, which renders it impossible to make the increases with fairness to officers of the various departments. The Government have therefore determined to submit the Estimates as they stand, and to ask the House to consider a scheme for the re-organization and classification of the Service. I shall therefore propose, in the course of a few days, some resolutions embodying the principles which the Government think should be given effect to by a Bill, and after discussion I shall ask that they be referred for the consideration of a Select Committee, consisting of members from both sides of the House, with directions to the Committee to report, after careful inquiry and consideration of the subject, as to the principles upon which a Civil Service Act should be founded. This question is of such importance to the