

ESTIMATES.

I would particularly direct attention of honourable members to an alteration I have made in the estimates for this year in regard to the item "Contingencies." Several new items have been introduced, so that recurrent expenditure which has hitherto been charged to "Contingencies" is now provided for under separate items, and the item "Contingencies" in future will provide only for unforeseen expenditure incidental to the vote.

As the outcome of the Public Service Classification Act of last session, certain officers hitherto classed as temporary have now been placed on the permanent staff, and their salaries have been provided for as such on the estimates. This will account for the number of officers and the amount of salaries being much greater in some Departments than those of last year.

The work of the classification of the Civil Service has not so far been sufficiently completed to enable the Board to send forward its report for presentation to Parliament. On that account the estimates submitted necessarily do not contain any provision for such recommendations as would in the ordinary course have been expected as the outcome of the classification of the Service. If the Board is unable to report before the end of the session, I will make provision for the various increases upon the supplementary estimates. In all cases the amounts of salaries shown on the estimates are those which the officers are now receiving, excepting those who are entitled to increments under classification or regulation.

ADDITIONAL FUNDS.

Having said so much, honourable members will be interested to know what provision is being made for ways and means for carrying on the public works of the current year. I have already informed you that £650,000 is to be expended upon roads, and of this amount £250,000 will be devoted to roads in the backblocks, the balance of the £650,000—viz., £400,000—being utilised for roads and bridges generally. £350,000 will be devoted to additions to open lines, making further provision for railway rolling-stock, &c. In order to enable the more vigorous prosecution of our railways to be carried on, I propose this year to set aside one million sterling for this purpose. For public buildings, telegraph and telephone extension, it is proposed to set aside £350,000, this making a total of £2,350,000. In order to enable provision to be made for this sum, I propose to pay to the Public Works Fund from the Consolidated Revenue £800,000, and to raise a loan for these purposes of £1,250,000. This, with the £191,800 available from last year's loan, and the £200,000 authorised under the Post Office Savings-bank Fund Investment Account, out of which the erection of post-offices in Auckland and Wellington will be provided for, gives a total of ways and means for the current year of £2,441,800.

RAILWAYS.

Having intimated to honourable members the amount it is intended to set aside for the prosecution of railway-construction, I may mention that it is proposed to add some new lines to the list of those in hand at present. By the end of March next three or four of the present lines that are in hand will have been completed. Full details of the proposals of the Government will be contained in the Public Works Statement which my colleague will before long have the pleasure of placing before honourable members.