

NATIONAL ANNUITIES.

It is my intention to ask Parliament to place on the statute-book this year a scheme for National Annuities. The proposals embodied in the Bill introduced last year have obtained the widest approval in this country, but further consideration has necessitated some alteration of its structure. Its main aims, however, are preserved—namely, those of providing an annuity for all men and women who choose to join the scheme; and, secondly (and this largely at the expense of the State), to relieve by contributions, in proportion to the number of children, the hardship which falls upon a worker's home from his sickness or accident. The contributions under the Act are low enough to enable any thrifty worker to obtain its benefits. It is a measure worthy of the support of every humanitarian. By a moderate payment in the years of his or her prime a contributor will be assured from want in old age or infirmity. Widows and children of contributors will be provided with assistance—the widow during widowhood, and the children until the age of fourteen. Such a system will remove the fear and anxiety of the worker as to his future and that of those dear to him, and should do much to encourage thrift.

MATERNITY.

Considerations both of the State's permanent welfare and of humanity must impress our people with the wisdom of providing a scheme whereby the wives of our low-waged workers and poorer small settlers may be relieved of some of the anxiety which at present accompanies motherhood. Legislation will, therefore, be introduced this year providing for the co-operation of Hospital Boards with the Government to provide a proper measure of relief in these cases. Until an adequate supply of midwives and sufficient accommodation in our hospitals for maternity cases can be furnished the Hospital Boards will be asked to make immediate arrangements for medical attendance upon expecting mothers in their own homes. The expense of this attendance will be defrayed partly by contributions from the husband, and the remainder out of the Consolidated Fund. It is proposed that in the cases in question the Government should pay two-thirds of the cost. In order that this provision should not be abused, it will apply only in cases where the earnings of the workers or settlers are under £200 a year. The scheme involves a good deal of detail provision which will, of course, be submitted for your consideration in the Bill itself.

UNEMPLOYED.

Legislation will also be introduced providing that our different police-stations throughout the country districts of New Zealand shall discharge the functions of local labour bureaux, the purpose of this provision being to furnish unemployed workers, on the one hand, with reliable information as to where work may be obtained, and, on the other hand, to furnish employers with similar information as to where labour is available. The general purpose of this provision is to enable labour to more promptly find its best market.

ANTI-TRUST LEGISLATION.

One of the disquieting features of our advancing civilization is the parasitic growth of combinations for the purpose of preying upon the body politic. In other countries less favoured than ours they have become a gigantic evil, necessitating tremendous efforts to keep them in reasonable subjection. Strong arguments may be advanced in favour of wider organization in industries than formerly existed. Cheaper production and less waste in distribution enable commodities to be supplied to the consumer at a much less cost than in the early stages of our industrial development. It cannot be denied that there are many advantages in connection with production and distribution on an extensive scale; but when smaller rivals are crushed out and competition eliminated, the temptation to exploit the consumer becomes irresistible, and in all countries these "trusts" become predatory in character at a certain stage of their growth. They then resemble the cells of the body that have changed into a cancer, which, unless removed or checked in its malign course, tends to destroy the remaining cells of the organism.