

It should be the object of every State which has the welfare of its wage-earners at heart to set an example in the matter of the treatment of its own employees. The State should, as far as lies within its power, be a model employer; the Government will spare no effort to shoulder its responsibilities in this respect.

EXTENSION OF WORKERS' HOMES SCHEMES.

It is intended by the Government to ask Parliament for the necessary authority to extend and modify the workers' homes scheme so as to make it apply more satisfactorily to country districts and to the requirements of married farm-workers and others. An amendment of the Loans to Local Bodies Act will be introduced giving County Councils the right to borrow for the purpose of providing workers' homes, so that local authorities, if they feel so inclined, may undertake this very desirable work for themselves; but the Government will also be prepared, on a reasonable guarantee being given by a local body or a certain number of responsible men, to provide homes in suitable localities for persons accustomed to farm work who prefer life in the country to life in the cities or towns. The area of land will be from 1 to 10 acres in each case according to the requirements of the occupants. The annual payment will be calculated at 5 per cent. interest, with sufficient sinking fund to pay off the capital value in, say, twenty-five years.

It is hoped by these proposals to provide bright and healthy surroundings, and so make country life more attractive to many who are at present crowded into the centres of population. Already the population of the towns and cities exceeds the population of the country districts. This is a state of affairs which must be remedied if prosperity is to continue, and the Government is of opinion that the proposals referred to will increase the number of producers and assist in properly adjusting the population as between town and country.

PUBLIC BUILDINGS.

"At present we erect buildings out of loan-moneys and if they are destroyed by fire we rebuild them out of loan-moneys." This is an extract from a memorandum by the Under-Secretary for Public Works dated the 8th June last.

The Government cannot allow such an unsatisfactory condition of things to continue for a day longer. The matter was submitted to the Government Actuary, and he has recommended that a special sinking fund be established to meet fire-insurance losses, and that £10,000 per annum should be paid out of Consolidated Fund and invested with the Public Trustee, who should be instructed to keep the fund fairly liquid. He further suggests that when the fund reaches £100,000 no further payments need be made out of the Consolidated Fund; that the State should continue to run the risk as at present of losses that occur until the payments into the fund, accumulated at compound interest, amount to £100,000. The Government has decided to adopt the Actuary's suggestions with the exception of the last one. It is so obviously unsound to replace buildings destroyed by fire out of the Public Works Fund that it has been decided to meet these out of the Consolidated Fund, instead of out of the Public Works Fund as in the past, taking a portion of the cost from the accumulated sinking fund above referred to, but so that the sinking fund is never less than £10,000. With good fortune in respect of fires it is hoped that in a few years time the accumulation of the sinking fund will amount to £100,000, when, the Actuary reports, the contributions from the Consolidated Fund may cease.

ROADS AND BRIDGES.

The Government are fully impressed with the urgent necessity of improving the means of communication for the settlers in the out-districts. Owing to the financial condition prevailing in Britain it may be necessary to restrict in other directions the expenditure from the Public Works Fund, but every effort will be made to provide not less than the usual amount for the opening-up of the back country and assisting pioneer settlers.

LAND LEGISLATION.

It will not be possible this session to deal with all the policy matters arising out of the land question, but a Land Bill will be introduced, which, among other proposals, will include a new method of acquiring land for settlement purposes and of settling such land on the deferred-payment system. There will be no increase