

Arbitration Act, and that no occasion has yet arisen to bring the machinery of the Labour Disputes Investigation Act (passed last year) into operation. A short amending Conciliation and Arbitration Bill will be submitted to Parliament during this session for the purpose of remedying some defects in the existing law relating to unions which have taken part in unlawful strikes.

Early in the present year a conference of representatives of Harbour Boards was convened by the Prime Minister to consider means of improving the conditions of casual labour in the principal ports of the Dominion. A great deal of consideration has been given to the subject, and as a result of the conference the employers of waterside labour in Wellington have formed an association for the purpose of improving the conditions of employment on the waterfront, whilst the Wellington Harbour Board is also adopting a similar scheme in regard to its employees. The intention of the scheme is to provide employment for about one thousand men on the conditions specified in the existing industrial agreement, the idea being to secure to the lowest paid of the recognized waterside employees an average minimum wage of £2 10s. a week. The new scheme will be brought into operation at an early date, and, if it proves successful, will probably be adopted in other ports in the Dominion. By this means it is hoped that a satisfactory solution of the problem of casual labour on the waterfronts will be found.

WORKERS' DWELLINGS.

Steady progress has been made during the past year in providing workers' dwellings, not only in the towns, but also in the country districts. Last year the total expenditure under this heading was £42,347, while the current year's programme comprises no less than 205 dwellings, entailing a gross expenditure of approximately £100,000. Rural workers' homes have been established in South Canterbury, and land for this purpose has been acquired in other localities in both the North and South Islands. During the six years prior to the Government taking office 210 workers' dwellings had been erected, at a cost of £146,622. No less than 305 have been built since, at a cost of £161,230. In this respect the Government are doing all they possibly can to keep rents within reasonable limits, and at the same time to provide comfortable homes for both town and country workers.

NATIONAL PROVIDENT FUND.

There was a substantial increase in the membership of the fund during last year, the number of entrants at the 31st December being 5,785, as compared with 2,660 at the end of the previous year. The total number of applications for enrolment received at the end of the financial year—31st March, 1914—had reached 7,538, and the funds in hand amounted to £35,000. During the year maternity benefits amounting to £600 were paid, while at the end of the financial year the amount claimed by contributors on account of this allowance totalled, since the fund's inception, £1,055. It is satisfactory to note that the expense ratio dropped to 19 per cent. in 1913 from 28 per cent. in 1912, and 56 per cent. in the first year.

The results achieved by means of the lecturing policy inaugurated by the Board should be gratifying to those who desire to see young people make provision for old age, and the figures indicate that large numbers are ready to exercise the necessary thrift in order to secure independent annuities.

A satisfactory feature of the fund's operations is the support granted to the official lecturers by employers. The assistance rendered by those employers who have agreed to collect the contributions from their employees is of the greatest value in furthering the objects of the Act. An amending Bill will be introduced this session enabling local bodies to join the fund and thus confer upon their employees the benefit of a national superannuation fund. The amending Bill will also contain a provision which will enable trade and industrial unions, by resolution, to enter into the fund, and will materially improve the conditions of married women contributors.

PENSIONS.

During the year a considerable increase has taken place in the number of pensioners on the roll, the figures at the 31st March were as follows: Old-age, 18,050; widows', 1,540; military, 1,240: total, 20,830. These numbers represent an increase as compared with the figures of the previous year of—Old-age, 1,541;