

Of the above-mentioned sum, £500,000 represents money for the purchase of land for soldiers, and as this may be paid for by means of debentures I estimate that the net amount which it will be necessary to obtain for works will amount to, approximately, £2,000,000. How far this will be given effect to must necessarily depend upon the sums which are from time to time available for investment on account of various Departments.

#### EXTENSION OF SOCIAL INSURANCE.

With the view of further promoting social insurance and the well-being of the State, I will ask the House to set aside a sum of £22,500 to provide for the establishment of a scheme that will enable the Government, through the National Provident Fund, to enlist the co-operation of the friendly societies. This sum will provide members with a maternity allowance of £4 at each birth. The vote also will include a subsidy which will enable members of friendly societies to obtain an annuity at the age of sixty at half the rates now charged to the National Provident Fund contributors.

In this connection I wish to point out that by subsidizing friendly societies in this manner the policy established under the National Provident Fund will be further promoted, and the principles underlying that Fund, by which assistance in their family responsibilities is granted to contributors, will be maintained.

This feature of the proposals also advances the State's policy in regard to social reform, and will be of special value in contributing towards the preservation of infant life at birth—a matter of vital importance to the nation at the present time, having regard to the present tremendous war wastage.

#### BOARD OF TRADE.

Arising out of the legislation passed last session, a Board of Trade consisting of three members, Messrs. W. G. McDonald, J. R. Hart, and P. Hally, was set up under the presidency of the Prime Minister. The Board commenced work on the 1st March last, and has been empowered to investigate breaches of the Commercial Trusts Act, and matters respecting increases in prices of the main necessities of life, to devise schemes whereby the future trade of New Zealand may be fostered and encouraged, and to collect information which may serve as the basis of legislation regarding post-war trade with enemy countries. Much information valuable to the Government and to the public generally will be collected by the Board, which will be helpful in determining the causes governing increased prices, now alleged to be partly due to exploitation. The Board will fill a gap in New Zealand's economic and industrial legislation, and will deal with problems directly affecting all classes of the Dominion.

#### COST-OF-LIVING PROBLEM.

During the year this matter has received a great deal of attention from the Government with a view to preventing high prices being charged to the people for their food-supplies. Every aspect of the matter was considered prior to the appointment of the Board of Trade, but difficulties of solution, due to the war, presented themselves in almost every direction. The needs of the great war have caused the Imperial Government to requisition a great proportion of the steamers and ships of the mercantile marine, and other countries have also made unusual demands on the ships sailing under their own flags. The tonnage remaining for general trade purposes of the British Empire has proved quite inadequate for carrying on the transport and commercial requirements of the Empire, and the oversea dominions have suffered in consequence. The regrettable but inevitable result was that freights rose to an unparalleled height, at which they still remain. This, with the phenomenal increase in the prices of goods in outside countries, including Great Britain, added enor-