

the State should make good any loss so incurred ; the idea being, no doubt, that the need is a national one, and that the extra cost of erecting houses immediately should be spread over the whole community. The suggestion has been acted upon by the British Government by means of subsidies based on statements to be made annually showing the shortage between expenditure and receipts. From the figures I have quoted respecting the cost of building in New Zealand I do not think that there would be any need to take any such step here.

During the year, largely in consequence of the pneumonic-influenza epidemic and the resultant outcry for an improvement in the housing of the people, arrangements were made for a town-planning conference, which was held in Wellington in May last, comprising delegates from municipal bodies and the various societies interested in this important question. It was resolved at the conference that the Government be asked to build one or more garden suburbs on town-planning lines. It may be explained that hitherto it has not been deemed advisable to erect houses under the Workers' Dwellings Act in this way, for the reasons, first, that the workers' dwellings system was in the experimental stage (both financially and otherwise), which has now been passed ; second, because the applications for workers' dwellings were scattered in small numbers throughout the numerous towns of the Dominion. Such a demand for improved housing has now set in, however, that an excellent opportunity is offered of establishing garden suburbs near the chief centres.

If this is decided upon, it is suggested that the question of providing for a communal kitchen and laundry at each settlement should be considered. It is important that some system of the kind should be adopted at an early date. Every one is aware of the increasing difficulty experienced by housewives in coping with their household duties ; this is brought about by the lack of domestic workers on the one hand, and is accentuated on the other by the higher standard of living that is now generally demanded. A remedy lies in applying business methods to housework so that it can be done in wholesale fashion, as in every other branch of work. We have the municipal supply of water and electric light, for example, in place of the former well or rain-water tank and lamp to each house, and why not a municipal or communal kitchen ? Dr. Saleeby, of England, in urging the continuance of the central kitchens instituted during the war, says, " In no other sphere of present-day civilization can be found such waste and inefficiency as in the private kitchen for the supply of meals," which is described as the contemporary of the spinning-wheel. The startling fact was, moreover, disclosed by the war that a large proportion of the men of the British dominions were unfitted for military service on account of malnutrition. In this connection one writer points out that women are not all cooks by nature, and that the preparation of food should be regarded as a department of applied chemistry. This aspect of the subject would, of course, receive its due attention if the work were carried out on business methods at a central depot. In last year's report of the Department (page 2) I called attention to the great advantages that would accrue from communal kitchens in closely populated residential areas. It is urged in the report of the Women's Housing Sub-committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction (page 13), and it is already adopted in some countries, besides England. In one town in California, for instance, meals are cooked at a central kitchen and delivered in heat-retaining vessels to the houses that order them. The system can also be well carried out in conjunction with an hotel. In a small town in California an hotel is surrounded by about 7 acres of houses, which can have their meals delivered from the hotel where they are cooked. The hotel's heating plant also supplies heat for the adjacent houses.

Attention might be called to the fact that in addition to building dwellings for its applicants the Department is prepared to purchase suitable houses that are already erected, subject to the price being less than the cost of building. In cases, too, where applicants have their own sections (wholly or partly paid for) the Department is prepared to consider the erection of dwellings on those sections, provided, of course, that they are suitable for the purpose. It is preferable, however, that the building of houses be carried out in convenient groups in order to economize the cost.

The Department has always encouraged the erection of dwellings in concrete in preference to wood, and a number of its dwellings have been so erected, some in solid concrete (which has so far, in the opinion of the Department's Architect, proved the most satisfactory), and others have been built in hollow concrete or with concrete slabs. Quite a number of new systems of concrete construction are now under investigation. The system that will best lend itself to standardization and the erection in large numbers, without giving the effect of sameness in appearance, should result in a great saving in cost.

The activities of the Department in the direction of housing have so far been limited to the purchasing of sections in small numbers here and there, and in the erection of dwellings by preparing plans and specifications, and letting contracts to private builders. It has been suggested that these activities might be extended in the following directions : Establishment of workshops ; importation and purchasing of materials ; employment of day labour ; establishment of garden suburbs (on town-planning lines) adjacent to the chief centres (these would include the question of providing communal kitchens and laundries). In view of the importance of housing at this time, these are matters that might be given careful consideration.

The annual inspection by officers of the Department instituted in 1914 shows that with a few exceptions the dwellings are well looked after by the occupants, and that usually much time and labour are expended in improving the properties.

It is satisfactory to be able to report that the arrears of rents and instalments on the 31st March, 1919, show a reduction of £161 2s. 2d. compared with the arrears on the 31st March, 1918, the amount being £1,353 14s. 7d., against £1,514 16s. 9d. on the 31st March, 1918. The average arrears per dwelling is £2 1s. 6d., compared with £2 7s. 4d. in 1918 and £2 11s. 8d. in 1915. These figures establish the financial success of the workers' dwellings system by which applicants to purchase may have houses built on a security of only £10 each. The result is also noteworthy in view of the continued