

The State collieries produced 265,267 tons of coal, as against 277,845 tons during the previous calendar year; while the profit on State coal business was £24,466, as against £18,521 for the previous financial year. These results are very satisfactory in view of the low rates at which the coal is supplied to the public.

The proportion of deaths from accidents at coal-mines during 1917 was lower than during any year, with two exceptions, since coal-mining commenced in the Dominion, the proportion of deaths being 1 per 1,000 persons employed and 1.93 per million tons raised.

The total output of coal from the mines of the Dominion for the year 1917 was 2,068,419 tons, a decrease of 188,716 tons as compared with the previous year.

UNEMPLOYMENT.

It is pleasing to record the fact that there has been very little unemployment during the past year; on the contrary, in nearly every trade the difficulty has been to obtain sufficient suitable labour.

INDUSTRIAL CONDITIONS.

There was a total of twenty-seven industrial disputes during the year. Several of these were of a trivial nature, involving the cessation of work by a number of men for a few hours or minutes, or refusal to work certain overtime. In twelve instances it was found necessary to institute proceedings for breaches of the War Regulations, Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, &c. The principal cases concerned coal-miners, Wellington gasworks employees, Auckland freezing-chamber hands, and Wellington coastal steamers.

In view of the abnormal conditions created by the war, both employers and workers generally may be congratulated upon the manner in which the industries of the Dominion have been so loyally maintained under difficult circumstances.

WORKERS' DWELLINGS.

Owing to the continued high cost of building, the number of new dwellings provided for workers was not as great as for previous years. There are now 647 workers' dwellings in the Dominion. When better conditions arise vigorous prosecution of this branch will be undertaken. At present the inflated cost of materials makes it almost impossible to build homes except at a cost that would be beyond the means of the workers.

NATIONAL PROVIDENT FUND.

The membership of the fund at the 31st March last was 12,000, and the accumulated funds amounted to £190,000. During the last financial year maternity claims amounting to £17,545 were dealt with, of which sum £13,612 was due to friendly societies' members and £3,933 to ordinary contributors.

An amount of £4,500 was paid in the past year on account of the half-contributions concession to contributors on active service, some 3,000 members having joined the Forces.

The maternity-benefit system operating through the friendly societies is working satisfactorily, and the officials of the various societies are co-operating readily with the Department in carrying out the necessary requirements under the Act in order to ensure prompt payment of the benefits to their members.

Steady progress is being made with the enrolment of local-authority employees under the Amendment Act of 1914, and I have no doubt that, as soon as satisfactory means can be adopted to bring clearly before these employees the undoubted benefits of the system, a large proportion of them will be enrolled in the fund.

FRIENDLY SOCIETIES.

The Mortality Reinsurance Fund established by the Government in co-operation with the societies for the purpose of protecting the benefit funds of these organizations from abnormal war risks now absorbs the reinsurance business of practically all of the societies in the Dominion.