

within the statutory limit of £1,000. Every effort was made to proceed with the dwellings by other means, such as by employing day labour or by letting small contracts to workmen or groups of workmen for labour only, the Department supplying the materials and advancing the money as the work proceeded.

The total number of dwellings built or otherwise provided, including those still in course of erection, is 508, and their estimated total cost is £466,000 (including land and administration charges).

These figures include ninety-six houses purchased by the Department for applicants.

Local authorities have taken advantage of the provisions of Part V of the Housing Act, enabling them to obtain loans for the erection of dwellings in their respective districts. Up to the 22nd June applications were entertained for a total sum of £333,380, whilst £106,000 had been actually paid over.

A few applications have been made by employers under Part III of the Act for loans to enable them to provide dwellings for their employees, and loans for thirteen houses have been granted.

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIES AND COMMERCE.

The Department of Industries and Commerce has extended its organization and operations since the last Financial Statement was submitted to the House. The Department now deals with economic and accountancy investigations, overseas trade and shipping, New Zealand industries, business methods and price-control, and has offices at Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin.

In the past the Department's activities have been concerned mainly with price-fixation, rationing of commodities, and the suppression of "profiteering." In March, 1920, price-investigation tribunals were formed in each of the main centres, and these bodies conducted a large number of investigations into complaints made by the public. For the period ended 31st March, 1921, the tribunals investigated 1,479 complaints, as follows: Auckland City and country districts, 566; Wellington City and country districts, 421; Canterbury, Marlborough, Nelson, and Westland, 260; Otago and Southland, 232.

Returns show that 902 cases were dismissed, the investigations showing that the prices were not unreasonable, and 189 complaints were dropped owing to insufficient evidence. In a further 222 cases the tribunals arranged refunds and adjustments. In all, twenty-seven cases were brought before the Courts for charging prices which were deemed to be unreasonably high, and convictions were obtained in seventeen cases, fines amounting to £4,545 being inflicted. The work of the tribunals assisted the Board in its general supervision of prices, and resulted in considerable savings to the consumers. Now that prices are tending to decline there is not the same necessity for the work of these tribunals, and they have accordingly been disbanded. In future the investigations will be conducted by the permanent officers of the Department.

During the past twelve months the Department has controlled the whole of the distribution of sugar for the Dominion. On the 1st July, 1920, the Board of Trade entered into an agreement with the Colonial Sugar-refining Company to buy raw sugar f.o.b. Fiji, to pay transportation charges to Chelsea and actual cost of refining, and to distribute the resulting refined sugar and by-products to the ultimate consumers. Under the agreement just expired the Government bought raw sugar at £35 10s. per ton f.o.b. Fiji, and the maximum retail price of the refined sugar was fixed at 6½d. per pound. Full particulars of the work done in this connection will be laid before Parliament in the annual report of the Department.

Owing to the acute demand for building-materials, mainly timber, bricks, and cement, regulations were gazetted on the 29th June, 1920, providing that construction works might proceed only by permit from the Board of Trade. These regulations were administered so as to ensure that the available supplies of such materials were used for essential purposes only. Immediately supplies became normal the restrictions were relaxed.

For the purpose of ensuring sufficient wheat being grown for the Dominion's requirements the Government again guaranteed the prices to be paid to farmers for