

Scientific Research for £250

The New Zealand Institute has taken quite seriously that modest little grant of £250 for scientific research wrung from a diffident Parliament by the Minister of Internal Affairs, and some useful suggestions have been put forward, having that strict regard for the immediately practical which we have advocated as being good policy in this utilitarian community. Researches are to be made into the phosphate rock of Canterbury, the cold storage of fruit, and the electrical prevention of frost in orchids. Following proposals made by Mr. L. J. Wild, the Institute has asked the Government to assist a project for agricultural research, and a soil survey of New Zealand. Professor Benham, President of the New Zealand Institute speaking at its recent annual meeting, mentioned that the Minister for Internal Affairs had expressed his intention of calling a conference which it was hoped would result in some practical steps being taken to bring the results of scientific research and methods into closer relation with some of the industries. It seemed to Professor Benham that the institute should take a much more active part in urging the importance of a better training in science or rather in scientific methods in the secondary schools, and in urging on the industrial community the need for scientific organisation and co-operation. The movement has been well launched, it will be seen, and further impetus will be gained when the proposed new State organisation to be known as the Industrial Efficiency Board gets to work. Its scope will not be limited to settling soldiers on the land, or in other ways re-absorbing them into industrial activity. It will have to do with the whole organisation of industry on efficient lines, and will no doubt enable New Zealand to effectively co-operate with the Imperial authorities in the great scheme of industrial reorganisation which we understand is already under weigh. The Empire is getting ready for peace, and we are going to profit permanently by the tragic lessons which began in August, 1914.

Fair Rents Legislation

When Parliament passed the Fair Rents Act last session we pointed out that it had a serious deficiency, but this did not matter, for the reason that the Act became practically a dead letter. It has, however, been used by a Wellington tenant to protect himself from a rise in rent which he considered unjustifiable.

A man named Ladd occupied a house in Lindum terrace, for which he paid 25s. a week to Winder, Mills, and Pearson, as trustees. Ladd received notice that his rent would be raised to 32s. 6d., but was later advised that in consideration of the fact that he was a good tenant, the rent would be reduced to 30s. Ladd protested against the 5s. increase, and appealed to the Court to fix the rent on the capital value. Evidence was given that the Government valuation in 1913 was £500, while the plaintiff produced a witness who valued the property at between £600 and £700. The defendants claimed that the property was worth over £1000. Owing to the difference in values, the Magistrate appointed an independent valuer, who valued the house and land at £700. Meantime defendants decided not to proceed further and the case was discontinued on the understanding that the rent

was to remain at 25s. per week. The Magistrate (Mr. W. G. Riddell S.M.) allowed costs (£3 7s. 6d.) against the defendants. Everything turned in this case upon the Government valuation, which is often not in accordance with the current value of the property. But the most serious deficiency of this legislation is that the valuation, covering as it does the land as well as the improvements, is absolutely unreliable as an indication of the value of a dwelling to the tenant, as distinct from its value to the owner, who may be allowing the dwelling to remain on valuable land, hoping in the future to put up a building to return something more in accordance with the value of the section. If the Wellington tenant in question had been living in a tumble-down shack in a charming and popular suburb, he would scarcely have been able to succeed in his action, for the reason that the capital value of the section would have been so large that a rent quite exorbitant for the dwelling could have been exacted, and yet not exceed the amount of interest which, under the law, a landlord is entitled to obtain. In regulating the dealings of private individuals the State is treading a difficult path, but Ministers, we suppose, are like ordinary mortals—they live and learn—so that in view of Parliament's known partiality for experimental legislation in the patchwork style, we may expect further amendments of what, at present is a fairly almost unworkable Act.

Standardisation

We occasionally hear of people who hold very pessimistic views regarding distraction of industry after the war. "What is going to happen to the new munition workshops?" they ask in a pessimistic tone indicating that they firmly believe the shutters will go up. But the machinery needed in turning out shell cases and guns can, in most instances, be adopted to the output of machine parts. The renovating and "scrapping" which has gone on in Britain's engineering workshops under the appalling necessities of war will be of tremendous benefit when peace arrives. Plans are being formed to keep all the factories going when they finish turning out munitions. Russia, its vast Eastern spaces hardly touched, is a veritable "land of promise" for the English maker of agricultural machinery, and at last he will compete in that field on fairer terms than before the war. Standardisation, and the organisation of huge outputs has been definitely adopted as the main line of policy in motor cars and steamships. In the latter case, large yards are already being laid down, to quickly counteract the losses due to Hun sea "frightfulness." A considerable amount of information is available as to American methods of specialisation and big outputs. Almost incredible are the results of this Policy. We have it on the authority of the sales director of an influential American motor car concern that, buying in 15,000 lots, his concern obtained complete sets of electric headlights and tail lamps for 12s. the set; and tires sold to the customer at £6 to £7 can be bought by the motor manufacturer in 15,000 lots at £3 to £3 5s. British trading methods are under revision, and we hope to see the era of peace accompanied by prosperity as a result, not only of manufacturing improvements, but better and cheaper banking facilities than have prevailed under past conditions of conservative monopolism.