

The crowning mercy for New Zealand is that the prices of its principal export products soared in keeping with the imported articles, otherwise the country would be in bad straits.

### Cheap Money for Housing

We suggested last month that the Governmental housing scheme should include the provision of cheap money for municipalities which will go in for building. This, we are glad to say, is part of the proposals indicated in the Budget, which on this point is worth quoting in full:

"The question of the housing of the people is receiving the closest attention of the Government, with the object of overcoming the shortage of houses which the lack of labour and building-material has brought about during the war, and which has resulted in the complete cessation of building operations by private enterprise. The difficulties created were, unfortunately, accentuated by the recent influenza epidemic.

"Now that conditions are improving, an endeavour will be made to enable the breadwinner of every family to become the owner of his home on the easiest possible terms. It is therefore proposed to introduce legislation widening the scope of the present law so as to enable local bodies (including Harbour Boards), as well as farmers and other employers in certain essential industries, to undertake their share of this important work. The Bill will include provisions enabling the Government to assist local authorities with the necessary finance for house-building purposes. The Government intends to proceed with the erection of dwelling-houses throughout the Dominion as rapidly as the supply of labour and materials will permit. In order to facilitate the work it has been decided to appoint experts, who will be instructed to devote their attention to investigating and introducing the latest methods of building-construction."

At the time of writing, the promised Housing Bill had not been presented to Parliament, but it must soon materialise, as the session has not long to run. The reference to the appointment of housing experts is very interesting. Apparently the Government is going further than dependence on the architects retained by the Labour Department. It would be a wise move to secure from England or America someone with practical knowledge of quantity production in concrete, for this seems to be the line most likely to produce real economy in building.

### Good Roads, Who Should Pay?

The "Good Roads" slogan has been taken up with avidity by the Counties Conference which met in Wellington recently, and has been brought into use to support the constant demand by local authorities for more State aid in the construction and maintenance of roads. Motors have such a wide range of travel that county authorities quite reasonably ask that they should have some revenue from traffic which does not originate in their own area, because much of the damage to arterial roads is done by "foreign" traffic. In parts of Taranaki, they have managed to make the outsider, also the local man, pay at the toll-gate for the excellent roads available for motorists' use, but this system is quite unfair in its operation, and there is

general agreement that the proper taxing authority should be the Government. It would be grossly unfair to have all sorts of tyre and wheel taxes in different counties, unless motor cars were only used in one county during the year. Motorists have not hesitated to suggest taxation on tires, to the extent of 15%, but the Counties Conference believes in a thirty per cent. impost. It would like to saddle the motor industry with almost the whole cost of arterial roads, forgetful of the fact that improved roads mean higher land values, and more wealth to the people served by improved communication. Only through the Government can this question of a fair allocation of the cost be settled, and motorists will have to watch the position carefully unless they do not mind being penalised as a class, so that wealthy landowners may escape what is undoubtedly a fair charge against the land. During a general discussion on the subject in the House of Representatives recently, the majority of Members expressed approval of a system under which arterial roads should be placed under the care of a national body which would be responsible for their construction, improvement and maintenance. The car-marking of a tire tax for road improvement would have to be followed by some such precaution against wasteful expenditure by local bodies, who cannot always be depended on to do the right thing in the interests of the general body of the travelling public, as exclusively local interests are more likely to come first. Local control also means wasteful duplication of experiments which could better be carried out by a central authority, and the results made available to everyone responsible for the upkeep of the roads. It is recognised that there is no single type of surface which can be applied everywhere as the best available for the condition of the locality, but under national direction, the necessary variations in construction could be properly settled, and a great deal of money saved.

### Millions for Housing

As we go to press, the Government's Housing Bill makes its appearance. Except for the fact that it gives borrowing powers up to two and quarter millions per annum for this very urgent purpose of housing, it is a disappointment, for there is really no fresh constructive suggestion in the whole measure. The familiar Workers' Dwellings scheme is elaborated a little, and provided with more money. The total cost of any dwelling and site must not exceed £750 if built in wood, or £850 if in any other material. As for the problem of managing to produce reasonably good dwellings for this sum, the Bill gives no illumination, for it leaves the whole thing to the existing machinery which has so far failed to solve the difficulties of the time. The State is to subsidise up to ninety per cent. any scheme put forward by State servants' associations for building garden suburbs or village settlements. A quarter of a million may be borrowed for this purpose. Then another quarter of a million may be borrowed for loans to employers in selected industries (not yet specified, but certainly including mining) so that the permanent workers in those industries may be adequately housed. Finally, local authorities will get money, at a rate of interest yet to be specified, from the State Advances Department for carrying out housing schemes "pursuant to any lawful authority"—and the Bill does not propose to extend their "lawful authority".