

· N · Z · BUILDING · PROGRESS

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NEW ZEALAND

THE STATE OF TRADE.

There is nothing more eloquent of the stagnant condition of trade than the curtailment of the New Zealand railway service, and the laying up of thirty steamers usually engaged in the coastal and inter-colonial traffic. This happens to be the quietest part of the year, when the important staple products of the Dominion are not ready for the market. Some slackness is always evident at such a time, but it has been accentuated this year owing to the scarcity of money curtailing the enterprise of those who wish to make ready for busy times which come with the reaping of the harvest. For the first time in many years, the New Zealand railways have failed to return sufficient to pay all running charges and interest, hence the reduction of mileage, which the commercial community has accepted as a reasonable policy under the circumstances. New Zealand is not by any means singular in experiencing bad times, for the principal railway systems of the world show similar symptoms of high costs piled upon a reducing revenue. Fortunately for the New Zealand railwaymen, the staff has been short for some years, and the men who did so well in handling heavy traffic with inadequate appliances are now reaping some benefit by their exceptional work. Arrears of holidays long overdue are now being taken by the railwaymen, and the service, as restricted, can be conducted without overtime which was so constant under normal traffic conditions. New Zealand's prosperity during the last six years has been due, not to high production, but to high values. We have now reached the position when nothing but increased production of staple products will meet the needs of the times, and as the railways charge for services, not on the basis of values, but on weights, we can predict that the slump, so far as this undertaking is concerned, will disappear with the coming in of the productive season.

HOUSING IN NEW ZEALAND.

Among the details disclosed by the last census are those relating to the number of inhabited

houses in New Zealand. The total increased during the five-year period, but when the increase in population is taken into account, it is found that there has been only one additional house for every five or six additional people in the country. Thus it is evident that the housing shortage has hardly been touched, despite the activity of the Government and some local bodies. In Auckland, the centre of largest population, it is satisfactory to find that even under the present conditions of depression, building is going on apace, and the timber mills are hard at work providing material principally for dwellings. Christchurch City Council has given special attention to the problem owing to the serious overcrowding existing in its area, and it has adopted an attractive scheme for quantity production of wooden dwellings to cost about £600 each. The Government has been asked to help with finance, and probably it will give the required aid although the Consolidated Fund is loaded with exceptionally heavy obligations at the moment, owing to the scarcity of private employment necessitating a heavy expenditure on public works and special relief works. When the problem of housing was mentioned incidentally by a Labour deputation to the Government recently, the Acting-Prime Minister, Sir Francis Bell, made the singular suggestion that this was a matter for the local authorities. He believed that the local bodies would resent the Government "poking its nose into their business." Sir Francis Bell must have forgotten the actual policy of the Government, which undoubtedly regards the housing problem as a national one, because its main activities are carried out by a State Department operating in many cities and towns in the Dominion. That the Government, when laying down its policy had regard to the local authorities, is evident from the financial arrangements it made in the last Housing Act. There is provision for loans to local authorities for housing purposes, but these loans were restricted, indicating that the Government proposed to shoulder the main responsibility. Auckland and Christchurch have been the only local authorities to complain of the restricted extent of the financial arrangements in the