

1893.
NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR

(REPORT OF THE).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

The SECRETARY, Bureau of Industries, to the Hon. the MINISTER of LABOUR.

SIR,—

Bureau of Industries, Wellington, 10th June, 1893.

I have the honour to present herewith the second annual report of this department. It covers the late financial year—viz., from the 1st of April, 1892, to the 31st of March, 1893. It is not brought up to the present date, as some time has necessarily been taken up in compiling returns into statistical tables.

The report is divided into sections entitled “Labour,” “Factories,” “Shops and Shop-assistants Act,” “State Farms,” and “General.” An additional section is appended concerning the expenditure of wages among the working-classes of New Zealand.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. W. P. Reeves, Minister of Labour.

EDWARD TREGGAR, Secretary.

LABOUR.

THE general condition of labour during the year ending 31st March has been, on the whole, of a very satisfactory character. In certain localities there has been pressure for short periods upon the resources of the department, but this has not affected the average result—viz., that there has been a steady expansion of trade and of general employment all over the country. In the North the kauri-gum export has increased very considerably in value, and has kept a steadily-growing number of men fully employed. In the extreme South the exceptionally good harvest caused not only the usual harvesters to be in request, but also absorbed many incoming hands from Australia, who, landing at the Bluff, rapidly spread themselves about that part of the country, to the benefit of both farmers and labourers. In the Provincial Districts of Wellington and Hawke's Bay settlement is progressing so rapidly, and so much bush is being felled each year, that a large number of workmen, in addition to the local population, find employment during the winter months. The Government has had in hand, under the Public Works and Crown Lands Departments, many miles of railway and road executed under the co-operative system, and this has had the effect of every now and then allowing the Bureau to relieve the slight congestions of labour in the chief towns of the colony. Of these co-operative works, the evidence of the men employed and of the officers is highly favourable, both as to cost and execution, but will be doubtlessly more explicitly spoken of in other departmental reports.

Concerning labour in the Provincial Districts of Otago and Canterbury, neither the circumstances nor the outlook are encouraging. Otago has not been severely pinched except in the towns of Dunedin and Oamaru, and even in these localities the proportion of men out of work to those in employment has been very small. Canterbury is a difficult district to assist by our usual principle of distribution, and of balancing supply against demand. In that part of the country many workmen are employed during the summer months, both for shearing and harvesting, but with the approach of winter the demand for labour fades away, and at last disappears altogether. Very few hands are required on farms during the cold season, and, in fact, the bulk of the annual work is only suited to a nomadic population. If sufficient money could be gained during the summer for the labourers to exist on through the slack season the problem would be solved, at all events for the careful and thrifty, but I am informed on good authority that the amount to be earned appears to be less each year, on account of the general introduction of more perfect “reapers-and-binders,” and other labour-saving machinery, and that it is quite impossible for a family to draw its annual expenditure within the lines of the summer wages. The result is that many deserving men have to apply to the Government to be put upon some kind of public work, and, as there are few roads or railways in Canterbury for which money has been allotted by Parliament (most of such works having been long completed), the necessity arises for deporting labourers to other parts. This causes hardship to families, in their breadwinner being sent away to a distance, and is a source of expense, primarily to the Government, and afterwards to the men themselves. I cannot, however,