

product in the markets of the world. The pigeon-holes which cover the walls of a trade-union office are full of trade statistics. The results of these observations are embodied in confidential annual reports circulated by the unions amongst their members, and dealing with the condition of trade. I have one of them now before me, from the Weavers' Association of North and North-east Lancashire. In these reports the rise and fall of the figure called the "margin" play a leading part. It is obtained by subtracting the price of raw cotton (calculated from the five leading sorts) from the price of yarn (of eleven kinds), or of calico (of twenty-three kinds). Thus there are two different margins, one for the spinners and one for the weavers, which show the relative position of the two industries. Now, these investigations have consequences of the utmost importance. On the strength of them the leaders of the operatives only put forward demands which they are sure of being able to carry through; while they quietly submit to the demands of the employers when they see that resistance would be useless.—Dr. Von Schulze-Gaevernitz's "Social Peace: a Study of the Trade-union Movement in England."

New Zealand will be unable to compete with other and better-informed countries if she remains in the dark as to the cost of production and the sources of supply among her own people. To give the Department of Labour a legal status would cost the taxpayer no more than at present, but would enable valuable information to be compiled. To expect statistics from a department not empowered to collect them is futile.

The Journal of the Department of Labour continues to be issued, and, judging by many letters received, is appreciated by the industrial classes. As editor I endeavour to provide, in addition to statistical information, extracts or reprints of articles by clever thinkers on social or labour questions, and also portray how modern problems are being treated in other countries, and under differing circumstances.

My departmental officers have done excellently in the different branches of their duties. Mr. Mackay has carried on factory inspection as well as his work as Chief Clerk, and has shown unfailing tact and energy. Mr. Lomas, in Christchurch, and Mr. Ferguson, in Auckland, also deserve praise for the manner in which they have carried out difficult duties without either laxity or harshness. Of the other factory officers I have spoken in another paragraph. Mrs. Grace Neil, our first woman Inspector of Factories, is doing valuable work, but her services are not included in the period covered by this report.

FACTORIES.

The general state of New Zealand factories during the year has been one of high efficiency. There have been few fluctuations in the skilled-labour market, and, although towards the end of the (financial) year there are complaints of slack trade in commercial circles, the depression has made no marked change in the conditions of industrial life. As a general rule, the factories and workshops of New Zealand are wholesome places in which to labour, and the health of the workpeople will compare favourably with that of any other class in any country.

We have been very free from strikes or trade difficulties of any kind, and the general feeling between employers and employed is as friendly as can possibly be expected. There is little friction over the working of the Factories Act, as most of the employers lend willing aid to carry out its provisions, and the few who attempt to evade them suffer in their good name among the workpeople they employ, and from the efforts of Inspectors to convict. Few countries have so complete and flexible a Factories Act as New Zealand, but there are some weak places in the Act which have been exposed in its administration, and which can be bettered by amendments. These I have set out at length in another part of this report, which also contains a list of convictions under the Act.

The subject of laundries is one needing some concerted action on the part of their owners. It is impossible that laundries should be excluded from the operation of the Act. In Great Britain the reports of Inspectors detail cases of grave hardship and suffering endured by women working in laundries, which in that country are not under the Factory Acts. Experience in this colony also proves the necessity of inspection. The low rate of wages, the insanitary conditions, and the long hours worked in some establishments before the Act made itself felt by controlling the business as a "handicraft," are sufficient reasons for determining to uphold the application of such a law. On the other hand, in the seaport towns, where most of the important laundries are placed, the work is of a highly intermittent and spasmodic character. For example, the arrival of one or two large steamers on Friday night or Saturday morning, with a quantity of linen to be washed before Monday, necessitates the full staff being employed on the Saturday (now half-holiday) if the work is to be done at all. Perhaps Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday may be slack days, or, again, they may be busy days. It seems, therefore, hard to tie down the proprietors of such a business to give their employés a half-holiday on any certain afternoon; but if this be not done there is little doubt that a hardworking class of women (whose standing position for many hours at their duty is excessively exhausting) will be debarred from that period of rest and relaxation which the State demands for all other working-women. The only way out of the difficulty is for the owners of laundries in each town to assemble and debate among themselves the day which in that locality is most suitable for the half-holiday, and then petition the Town Council to set apart that particular half-day for their trade. If a narrow spirit of competition forbids such discussion and agreement, laundry-owners must be content to bear the annoyance and loss of the Saturday afternoon.

The sections of the Act dealing with dining-rooms in factories are difficult to administer. In the larger establishments, setting apart a room as a dining-room is comparatively easy, because ground-space is procurable and money forthcoming. In towns, however, where small firms carry on their businesses in two or three rooms, hired or leased in some building not originally intended to be used as a factory, the difficulties are great. If the dining-room is insisted on, it sometimes puts the employer to grave inconvenience, as another room in the same building, or adjacent thereto, may not be procurable, and he is therefore in the dilemma of either shifting from the premises to some other place, or of breaking the law by not complying with the provisions of the Factory Act. This is a serious position, as suitable premises cannot be found at short notice, and a change of locality sometimes means loss in business. The sections of the Act are, nevertheless, only proper and right for the protection of the health of the operatives, and must be obeyed.