

SESS. II.—1897.
NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR

(REPORT OF THE).

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

The SECRETARY, Department of Labour, to the Hon. the MINISTER of LABOUR.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wellington, 19th August, 1897.

I have the honour to present herewith the sixth annual report of this department. It covers the late financial year—viz., from the 1st April, 1896, to the 31st March, 1897. It is not brought up to the present date, as some time has necessarily been taken up in compiling returns into statistical tables.

I have, &c.,

The Rt. Hon. R. J. Seddon, Minister of Labour.

EDWARD TREGEAR, Secretary.

LABOUR.

The year that has just passed has brought great encouragement to those interested in the welfare of the working-classes and of the colony generally. The upward movement, which showed itself more as a strong tendency last year than as actual advance, has become during this annual period a steady, consistent progress in both wages and employment. This is shown in several ways, notably in the following:—

1. There has been a falling-off in the numbers of the unemployed assisted to the extent of about half those aided in each of the years 1893, 1894, and 1895.*

2. The numbers of those employed in factories and workshops have increased by several thousands.

3. The applications to work overtime to be granted to those already in employment have largely increased.

There has not been any such sudden augmentation in the output or value of any of the colony's industries as to warrant a "boom" of any description; and this is a subject for congratulation, as such periods of commercial excitement are always followed by reaction and depression. Instead of this there has been steady and successful application to legitimate work, and the result is of a cheering character. The harvest was not so great as was hoped for in the early spring; but the damage caused to crops by unseasonable weather was compensated for by the rise in the price of grain. The timber trade has been very busy, not only in the kauri districts of the North, but all over the country: for instance, in a small district like Greymouth thirteen sawmills were busy preparing timber for export. The fishing industry has been brisk in several places, the Bluff alone exporting 7,000 tons of fish, besides a large quantity used for local consumption. The frozen-meat

* The figures of the census of New Zealand in 1896 show 14,759 males and 2,637 females as having entered themselves "not at work." As these figures have been quoted to attempt to prove that the Labour Department underestimates the number of unemployed in the country, the following explanation may appear necessary:—

The men called "unemployed" by this department are the labourers who, being desirous of obtaining work, have been sent to employment, and have received the advance of passages, &c. They do not represent the same class as those entered in the "not at work" column of the census. Statistics show that the latter form about 6 in every 100 of the male breadwinners, and the proportion should be allotted (in my opinion) as follows:—

(1.) Intermittent workers—viz., those who have employment for five days out of six, or for ten out of twelve months in the year, but who were "not at work" just at the time the census was taken	3 in 100
(2.) Men who through vice or laziness are "not at work," and do not wish to get work so long as their families will keep them	2 in 100
Then follow two or three classes having each a far smaller percentage, viz.:—	
(3.) Those who through approaching age are supported by their families	1 in 100
(4.) Persons receiving out-door relief from charitable aid, but who nevertheless write themselves as "not at work"	
Total	6 in 100

It is to be also considered that the census was taken on the 12th April, a date when, the harvest being just finished, a number of labourers had been recently discharged from work. This swells the number of those written above as in class 1—the intermittent workers.

The labour market is in a far better condition than in April, 1896.