

231. The dramatic agents in these changes have been movements in aggregate Armed Forces, absorption of juveniles and women, and postponed retirements of elderly workers. The total number of persons in the Forces at those dates quoted were 3,000, 129,000, and 102,000 respectively. By the end of 1944, 47,486 ex-servicemen and women had permanently re-entered industry, and 9,100 more men from the Pacific Division were held in essential industry until such time as they would be needed for service with the Middle East Division.

(iii) The Future Working Population

232. In the absence of large-scale immigration, New Zealand's total labour force, but for one uncertain element, could be expected to advance but gradually on the pre-war figure of 700,000. This follows from the slowness with which the total population is increasing, although delayed marriages of ex-servicemen will at least temporarily stimulate the birth-rate. The one unpredictable element, the extent to which women will be employed, might, however, upset this forecast. Instead, it is feasible that the wartime industrialization of women will not only persist, but in the post-war years give way to a still wider industrialization.

233. Factors inviting the conclusion that the present total figures of female employment will in the long run not only recover the ground (estimated at 8,000) lost by it during the last twelve months, but also steadily advance, are as follows:—

- (a) The engagement of women in industry is not a wartime development alone, but was already significantly high (and fast increasing) before the war, and this tendency may be expected to continue.
- (b) Expansion of secondary industry in New Zealand has rested mainly on female labour, and, regardless of expanding opportunities for men, a *pari passu* demand for female labour can be expected.
- (c) Women workers have habituated themselves to a new level of consumption expenditure and will balance the loss of earnings that disemployment would involve, somewhat carefully against domestic considerations.
- (d) The majority of the women at present serving in the Forces will return to industry on demobilization.

SECTION II.—THE DEMAND FOR LABOUR

(i) Pre-war Labour Shortages

234. Although the level of total employment had risen considerably during the four immediate pre-war years, it was still necessary to administer various employment-promotion measures. The ascertainable data of that period suggest that increasing purchasing-power and redistribution of national income were augmenting the total number of persons employed, but were doing so somewhat unevenly. For example, the major increase in total employment was due to the increasing absorption of women workers by a number of the rapidly expanding secondary industries, while a reverse tendency was taking place in a number of industries which, due to cost pressures or to the difference in male and female wage rates, were dispensing with the services of male workers. These workers had increasingly to be provided for by absorption on employment-promotion schemes, on public works, and, as it happened, by the State services, which, from that time on, were becoming large employers of temporary workers.

235. Notwithstanding the general employment position, there had from 1936 onwards been definite shortages of labour in several industries. These shortages were almost entirely confined to skilled workers in the building and engineering industries, as well as to professional and technical workers of different classes. By 1938 the shortage of building and engineering tradesmen had become so acute that several hundreds of tradesmen of both types were imported by the Government from Great Britain and Australia. In addition, the labour force of the building industry had been augmented by several hundreds of skilled workers as a result of the State-subsidized adult apprenticeship scheme. Despite these accretions to the skilled labour force in the building and engineering industries, there remained a marked shortage of almost all tradesmen in both of these industries. It has been estimated that in 1939 several thousand building tradesmen (all classes were affected) and a somewhat smaller number of engineering tradesmen could have been absorbed.

236. At this time, too, a farm-labour shortage, particularly in the dairy-farming branch of the industry, had made itself felt. Since the recovery in 1935, a farm-labour problem had shown itself, and by 1938 and 1939 the number of unsatisfied vacancies for farm workers at the peak of the season was well over the thousand mark. So far as the farming industry was concerned, however, the labour position was better than this figure would indicate, because the total number of workers offering was in excess of the vacancies. The difficulty was that the surplus of labour was to be found in the South Island or among the ranks of married men, for whom accommodation would be required. The preference of farmers, particularly of dairy-farmers, was for experienced single men or inexperienced youths, in respect of whom a subsidy under the farm-training scheme then in existence would have been forthcoming.

237. The pre-war employment picture was, then, one of heightened total employment. Skilled-labour shortages were, however, noticeable in the building and engineering industries as well as in certain manufacturing industries, while certain professional workers were in short supply.

(ii) Wartime Shortages

238. It was not until the middle of 1940, by which time some thousands of volunteers had been absorbed by the Forces, that a general shortage of labour became noticeable, and not until 1941 that the general shortage presented difficulty. By this time, however, the industries in which pre-war shortages were noticeable were in most difficult straits, particularly the engineering and footwear manufacturing industries. In order to meet the labour problem in these two industries, the