

It is to be sincerely regretted that the industrial peace has also been marred by the coal-miners' unfortunate strike at Blackball, which took place on the 27th February last. On this date I was directed by you to proceed to Greymouth by the first steamer. I arrived at Blackball on Monday, the 2nd March, and met the miners' officials and the mine-managers the same evening. The following morning, at the invitation of the union, I met the men in a body, and pointed out to them that they had failed to take the proper and constitutional course, and that the Department was in duty bound to take steps to uphold the law. I made it perfectly clear to them that when they became dissatisfied with the fifteen-minutes crib-time (which really means the time allowed for their midday meal) it was the union's duty to approach the management with a view to getting the time extended in an amicable way. If this means had failed, then they should have requested the company's representatives to join them in an application to the Arbitration Court, with a view of getting a just settlement of the vexed question in a constitutional way. If this course did not answer, then they could have appealed to this Department, which would have made application to the Court for a ruling, taking care to ask both sides for their reasons in writing for or against the request for an extension of time for the said meal. This would have been perfectly legal, and in strict accordance with the regulations laid down by the Court (*vide* Vol. iv, page 394, Book of Awards). I also drew the union's attention to the fact that it was in error in assuming that section 37 of "The Coal-mines Act, 1905," as amended by section 2 of the Amendment Act of 1907, limited the days' work underground to eight hours, and pointed out that the said section distinctly and unmistakably provided for overtime, proving most conclusively that there is no such thing as a statutory eight-hours day in New Zealand. I tried every reasonable available means to bring about a termination of the strike. In my opinion, this is one of the most important functions of the Department. I reported the result of my investigation to you on the 4th March, and received instructions to take proceedings against the union the following day. On the 6th day of March application was made to the Court of Arbitration, then sitting at Christchurch, and arrangements were at once made by the Court for the hearing of the case on the 11th March. The decision was given on the 13th of the same month, and five days later the union was called upon by the local Inspector of Awards to pay the fine. On receipt of the union's reply that they had no funds, I sent a final notice asking for payment forthwith, and the day after I got their further reply saying they had no funds the Crown Solicitor at Greymouth was instructed to issue a distress warrant. This was done with the utmost despatch the process of law would allow. The distress warrant was returned "No effects," and instructions were given to the Crown Solicitor to apply to the Arbitration Court for orders against the men individually, which was done, also without delay, and the directions of the Court have been carried out.

Two strikes each of only a few minutes' duration occurred at Castlecliff and Aramoho Freezing-works. At Castlecliff the fellmongers' labourers made a demand for an increase of 1½d. per hour, which was conceded under protest by the secretary of the Wanganui Meat Freezing Company; work was then resumed by the men. At Aramoho the chambermen made a demand for 1s. 3d. per hour ordinary time and 1s. 6d. per hour for overtime: this demand was also conceded under protest, the company having work in hand that could not be delayed. As already stated, these strikes lasted only a few minutes. The men's explanation was that, as they thought their union was defunct, they considered they were not liable under the Act. As no meeting of the union had been held for over twelve months, they were under the impression that the registration of their union had been cancelled.*

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

The registry offices throughout the Dominion have, on the whole, been well conducted, and very few complaints have reached the Head Office. Great care has been exercised in dealing with applicants for licenses under the Act. The most serious complaint that has come under my notice is in connection with a registry-office keeper who sent three Austrians from Auckland to Taranaki to what he informed them would be a twelve-months job, knowing well at the time the men left Auckland that there was no definite engagements for the men in Taranaki. When the matter was brought under the notice of the Department, and the registry-office keeper was asked for an explanation, he was full of regrets, and sent a cheque for £3 16s., the amount required to refund the three men's steamer-fares and the fees he had charged them. The case was so serious that the Department took action in the Stipendiary Magistrate's Court. The case was contested and dismissed, the Magistrate ruling that there was no provision in the Act to meet such a case, and gave it as his opinion that under the Act it was not necessary that there should be jobs for men to go to; so long as the registry-office keeper was satisfied there was a reasonable chance of the men getting work in the district they were sent to, it would suffice. This is certainly a very serious defect, and should be remedied with as little delay as possible by an amendment to the existing law.

* Citations have since been filed against these workers for breach of section 15 of "The Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act Amendment Act, 1905."