

These men seem to make a point of travelling from town to town in search of work, whereas if they could only be induced to strike out into the country while they had a few pounds, instead of sticking to the railway-line, they would have a much better chance of obtaining permanent employment; and their absence would considerably relieve the labour market, to the advantage of the casual worker who through domestic or other reasons cannot leave the towns. It is a very difficult matter to regulate the supply of casual labour in such an extensive district as Taranaki, many portions of which are almost isolated during the winter months, there being no railway or road communication. As officer in charge of the Labour Department I have made every effort to find out what men were required, and where they were wanted. Employers in the country do not seem to appreciate the advantages of this Department, many of them holding that if a man wants work he should look for it. They seem to quite lose sight of the fact that while they may be in want of labour the labourer himself may be looking for work at the other end of the province, perhaps sixty miles from where he is wanted. If application were made to this Department by both parties this difficulty would be obviated. I know the opinion is held by some people that there is any amount of farming and bushfelling work to be had in Taranaki. I have made very careful inquiries throughout the province, and I am convinced that there is more casual labour offering than there is work for.

FACTORIES.

One hundred and fifty-six factories were registered in the New Plymouth district, employing 735 males and 118 females. 6,268 hours overtime was worked, 3,970 hours by men and 2,478 hours by women and boys.

During the year 1,098 visits of inspection were made, 561 to factories within the New Plymouth district, and 537 to factories in other parts of the province.

There have been 33 prosecutions under the Act, while a large number of complaints have been inquired into. Eight of these latter have been settled out of Court, while in the other cases no action was taken, the cases being either without foundation or of such a trivial nature that to take any action would have caused quite unnecessary irritation without accomplishing any good. There were also 2 prosecutions under the Workmen's Wages Act. Convictions were recorded in all cases.

Polls have been taken under section 36 of "The Factories Act, 1908," at Patea, Eltham, Stratford, Inglewood, and Waitara to decide whether the factory holiday for women, and boys under the age of eighteen years should remain on Saturday or be observed on the day appointed for shops. In each case the electors decided in favour of the factory holiday being observed upon the same day observed by shops. A poll is to be taken in New Plymouth on the 28th April on the same question.

In inspection of factories special attention has been paid to ventilation and sanitation, and the comfort and convenience of employees. Employers have always been ready to make any reasonable alterations to this end. As nearly all the towns of Taranaki have a high-pressure water-supply and sewerage system there is no difficulty over the question of sanitation, as nearly all factories are connected with the sewer.

The directors of the various dairy and cheese factories, slaughtering, freezing, preserving, and cool-storage companies are to be congratulated upon the excellent state of efficiency and cleanliness maintained in their respective factories. The dairy factories throughout the province, with very few exceptions, are equipped with the most modern machinery obtainable; the walls of the factories are painted with enamel or sanitary paint, and the machinery is kept clean and bright. The condition of the accommodation provided for the use of employees depends, however, to a great extent upon the employees themselves. Some men take a great interest in their quarters, and keep them in a clean and comfortable condition, while others, no matter what furniture or appliances they may be supplied with, do not take the least interest in their surroundings, but seem content to sleep or eat anywhere, and the idea of tidying and cleaning up their quarters does not seem to occur to them. Fortunately, there are not many of these men about the factories. I am of the opinion that the men's accommodation should be inspected by the manager of the factory at least once in each week, and that the responsibility for the cleanliness of the place should be taken in succession by the men accommodated. If the directors were to introduce such a rule, and see that it was observed, there would soon be a very noticeable improvement in the condition of the accommodation-houses occupied by some of the dairy-workers of this province.

Certificates of fitness enabling young persons under the age of sixteen years to work in factories have been granted to 15 boys and 6 girls. Applications were made and refused in the cases of two boys over the age of fourteen years who had only passed the Second Standard. With the facilities afforded for education it should be an easy matter for any child to pass the Fourth Standard at fourteen years of age even in the country districts. It is to be regretted that there are even a few parents who are willing to sacrifice their children's chances in life in order to gain the few shillings the child may earn.

Eight accidents have been reported during the year; fortunately none of these were of a serious nature, and none could be attributed to faulty construction of machinery or carelessness of employers. In all cases the employees concerned were covered by insurance.

SHOPS AND OFFICES.

During the year 232 shops were entered on the register.

There were 811 hours overtime worked.

There have been 4 prosecutions under the Act. The provisions of the Act have been very closely observed by shopkeepers, many of whom have expressed their appreciation of its provisions.

A great many visits of inspection have been paid to shops throughout the province, and particular attention has been paid to sanitation, ventilation, and seating-accommodation for females, and overtime. The wages paid is in most cases much in excess of the amounts specified in the Act.