

CASUAL LABOUR

Many men have been assisted by this office to employment, both Government and private.

FACORIES ACT.

I have found the employers willing to observe the provisions of the Act, and when in doubt on any matter to submit the question for the consideration of the Department. I have found a general desire to adhere to the Act, both in spirit and letter, and during my visits every facility is given to help the Inspector make inquiries.

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

The provisions of this Act have worked satisfactorily during the period, the number of prosecutions being low.

Advantage has been taken by a majority of the shopkeepers, under section 25 of the Act, to fix the closing-hours, and, as a general rule, the shopkeepers adhere to the hours without much difficulty; in only one or two cases have warnings been necessary.

I have, &c.,

R. T. BAILEY,

Inspector of Factories.

The Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.

PALMERSTON NORTH.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Palmerston North, 8th April, 1909.

I have the honour to submit to you my annual report of matters coming within the jurisdiction of the Palmerston North district office of the Department of Labour for the year ending the 31st March, 1909.

GENERAL.

The year just concluded, although possibly a little quieter than for many years past, cannot be said to have been in any way unsatisfactory. That prospects have been encouraging in spite of the wave of depression noticeable throughout the Dominion is evident from the fact that no less than 25 employers have received sufficient inducement to start new factories in Palmerston North, while 6 others have enlarged their staff sufficiently to necessitate a higher registration fee being paid.

Skilled labour has been in fair demand, and work has been steady, although not such a large amount of overtime has been worked during the year as in past years.

Not many buildings have been erected during the past year, but during the last few weeks there have been several fires, so that there are expectations that new and larger business premises will arise from the ashes, and a large amount of work may be looked for in this direction during the coming year.

The engineering trade has been brisk, and more overtime has been worked in this line than in any other.

Tailors, tailoresses, and dressmakers have had a busy year, and especially the two last named. One of the greatest difficulties employers have had to contend with has been a dearth of female labour, and girls are wanted in all directions.

The Department has been approached on all sides by applicants for domestic servants, and a wish has been generally expressed that the female-bureau system now established in the chief centres should be extended to Palmerston North. Its success is assured.

During the past few months we have had rather more unemployed calling than for many years past. Many of them have been new arrivals simply passing through, and calling at every township *en route* on the lookout for work. Others again have called at the office day after day. There are a few among them who really do not want work, and will not take work when offered (one refused 8s. per day), but there are many really good men whom we have found a difficulty in placing. They have been willing to go anywhere, but we have not known where to send them, although there have been statements as to a dearth of labour in some country districts. The fault lies in the fact that the employers of labour do not utilise the facilities offered by the Department. It is stated that at a recent meeting of the Farmers' Union Provincial Executive one member complained that "an unlimited amount of fencing at 10s. a day was going begging in the vicinity of his place because labourers refused to leave the town." The report also goes on to refer to another complaint of the scarcity of farm labour in another member's district. He said that a recent arrival from the Old Land, who was a good casual hand, was being besieged from all sides with work. Although such statements as these may be sometimes exaggerated, I quite believe that work is available for many men, but unless the Labour Department is notified of the requirements of employers who want fencing or farm labour done, how can we possibly know where to send the men? It costs the employers nothing to communicate with the Department, but it means everything to the man who, perhaps with a wife and family dependent upon him, is willing to work, and looks everywhere for work, but does not know the right place to strike.

In the same paper I saw also an advertisement inserted by the Engineer of a County Council: "Wanted at once ten good pick-and-shovel men." Application for the work is advertised to be made at a small settlement, houses about half a mile apart, nine miles coach ride from a flag-station, and a few miles walk after that. The cry is that the men will not leave the towns. Is it likely that men will go out to a place such as named in this advertisement on the chance of finding the situations filled, at the cost of two days' loss of time, and travelling-expenses? Here again, if the