

INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION ACT.

The year just ended has been characterized by a considerable amount of industrial unrest, no less than twenty-one "strikes" having taken place. It is satisfactory, perhaps, to report that of this total six only can be regarded as serious, and even these fade into insignificance compared with industrial disturbances in Continental Europe or America. The most serious strike both from a monetary point of view and in duration was that of officers of the small coastal ships. This lasted for five weeks, and the loss in money on both sides totalled about £24,000. The next important case was that of the Wellington Tramways, lasting four and a half days, and causing a loss of about £2,100. Over three hundred labourers in Auckland were on strike for one week, and the loss occasioned to both sides reached about £1,200. The other three cases were less serious. A full statement of the circumstances surrounding each of the more serious strikes is as follows:—

Wellington Tramways (from 31st January, 1912, to 5th February, 1912).—In this case 358 men struck work at the instigation of the Tramways' Union, which demanded the removal from office of an alleged incompetent and unpopular ticket inspector. On the demand being refused the men ceased work, and a total of 413 men were idle for four and a half days, during which time the whole service was at a standstill. The matter was settled by the City Council agreeing to remove the inspector to a position where he would have no dealings with members of the Tramways Union, and the men returned to work. The loss to the men in wages during the period they were idle was £893, and the estimated loss in revenue to the Council was £1,200. As the men were working under an industrial agreement the strike was illegal, and the union was accordingly summoned before the Magistrate's Court for a breach of the strike provisions of the Act. The offence was admitted, and a fine of £100 imposed. Satisfactory arrangements have been made with the Department for payment of the fine.

Wellington Meat Workers (from 9th February, 1912, to 23rd February, 1912).—160 labourers assisting slaughtermen struck, their demands *re* payment for work done after 5 p.m. and before 8 a.m., and for preference to unionists, being refused. The strike lasted fourteen days, during which time slaughtering operations, &c., had to be suspended and a total of 320 men were rendered idle. The loss to the men in wages was £2,326. The loss sustained by the company is difficult to estimate, but there was considerable loss occasioned to the farmers through the sheep having to be sent back to the country, thereby causing depreciation in value and condition. The dispute was settled by agreement as to conditions of employment between the parties, the chief concession to the men being preference to unionists. One of the conditions of settlement was that the union should register under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, and the agreement mentioned be filed as an "industrial agreement" to be in force for three years. As the men were not working under any award or industrial agreement at the time, the strike was not illegal.

General Labourers, Auckland (24th October, 1911).—In this instance, at the instigation of the General Labourers' Union, 310 men employed on city drainage-works in Auckland struck work on account of one employer letting a subcontract to six members of the union. The strike lasted for one week, during which time 330 men were idle. The loss in wages to them was £765, whilst the employers suffered to the extent of £433. The matter was settled by agreement, the Drainage Board undertaking to insert a clause in all future contracts prohibiting subcontracting. Proceedings are pending against the union for a breach of the strike provisions of the Act.*

General Labourers, Onehunga (7th October, 1911).—In this case twenty-three men employed at drainage-work demanded an increase in wages, and on this being refused they struck. They were receiving 1s. 6d. per hour, part of their work being to attend to drainage leading to the sea, which could be done only when the tide allowed. The men asked for 5s. for tidal work, irrespective of the time worked, which was usually not more than two hours. The men were idle for two days after which the contractor conceded the demand, as other men could not be obtained to carry on the work. The loss to the men in wages was £25, while the loss to the employer is estimated at £100. No action was taken against the men, as it was shown that they acted under the impression that the cancellation of their union, which had been applied for, had been effected, and that therefore the award under which they were working had expired. In which case they would not have been liable under the Act for striking.

Coastal Ships' Officers, Wellington (2nd October, 1911).—In this case twenty-five mates, employed on small coastal steamers running out of Wellington, ceased work, being dissatisfied with the rates of pay and hours of work, particularly *re* overtime, fixed by an award of the Arbitration

* A penalty of £60 was subsequently imposed.