

REPORTS OF LOCAL INSPECTORS OF FACTORIES AND AGENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR.

AUCKLAND.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Auckland, 8th April, 1912.

I have the honour to submit for your consideration my report for the year ending 31st March, 1912.

LABOUR.

It is pleasing to record that the year just ended has been a very busy and progressive one, all classes of labour having enjoyed a most satisfactory year.

Tradesmen in all branches of the building trade have been fully employed, and, with the exception of stonemasons, continue to be so. The latter branch has fallen off considerably during the year, due to the fact that several buildings in which stone was used have been completed; yet in this case only one man has reported himself as out of work. The engineering trade has improved during the year, and no men have been reported out of work since December last. Brickmakers also have been very busy throughout the period, and continue so. There is every prospect of the present activity in the skilled trades continuing for some time to come.

Unskilled labour has had a very satisfactory year. There has been no difficulty in capable men obtaining employment, which is due to the extensive drainage-works, and also to the general activity of the building trades. During the year there have been assisted to work, through the office, 1,250 men—viz., 206 married men with 477 dependent upon them, and 1,044 single men. Twenty-five wives have also been assisted to join their husbands. Of the above number, 638 men were sent to private work, and 612 to railway and other public works.

At no time during the year has there been any congestion of labour, as all suitable men were readily placed in work. The difficulty has been to get suitable men to supply the requirements of farmers, as during the busy season many applications for farm hands, milkers, &c., could not be filled because we had no suitable men to send; we firmly declined to send undesirables, of whom, unfortunately, there are plenty.

FACTORIES ACT.

There is very little trouble given in the administration of this Act. It is so well known by both employers and employees that evasions rarely occur, and they are not of a serious character when discovered and inquired into.

During the period under review factories in all branches of industry have had a busy year, and in some trades (notably shirtmaking and clothing) employers have experienced difficulty in getting hands to cope successfully with the demand made on them.

This year 1,608 factories, employing 11,525 persons, were registered. There are also 1,922 employers who are generally employed in the factories, but are not included in the number given above, so that there are actually 13,447 persons employed. Details of employees are: 685 males under sixteen years, and 7,539 males over sixteen years; total male employees, 8,224: 561 females under sixteen years, and 2,740 females over sixteen years; total female employees, 3,301.

Five hundred and sixty-four permits have been issued to persons under sixteen years to work in factories—viz., 256 boys and 308 girls. Of the boys, 103 passed Standard IV, 53 passed Standard V, 96 passed Standard VI, and 4 Standard VII. Of the girls, 133 passed Standard IV, 73 passed Standard V, 98 passed Standard VI, and 4 passed Standard VII. It is pleasing to note that there is a great improvement in the number of children who have passed Standard VI as compared with last year's return, being 204 as against 112 for last year. It is to be regretted that a goodly number of young persons (chiefly boys) do not pass the Fourth Standard, and being over fifteen years of age, cannot be compelled to go to school, so that the Inspector is faced with the alternative of giving them a chance to learn a trade or allowing them to run wild on the streets. I may add the former course is generally adopted. Every possible inquiry is made before issuing permits, and in the case of the boys referred to it is generally found that the boy is the victim of the parents' negligence.

There were 1,916 women and boys who worked 85,471 hours' overtime, and 564 men who worked 32,818 hours' overtime. There is a considerable falling-off from last year's return, the reason, so far as women and boys are concerned, being that work has been more steady, and the necessity for overtime did not arise so frequently.

Two hundred and seventy-eight accidents were reported during the year—one fatal, 28 serious, the remainder slight, or not of a serious nature, consisting of cuts, bruises, &c., incidental to work in factories where machinery is employed, and necessitating in most cases absence from work for only a few days. Care is taken to see that machinery is properly guarded.

There were 188 investigations made into alleged breaches of the Act. In 115 cases there was no cause for complaint; in 48 cases there were trifling irregularities, which were promptly rectified; 25 cases were taken before the Court, and 23 convictions, with penalties amounting to £44 11s. and £12 2s. 6d. costs, were secured, and 2 cases were dismissed without costs. There was also the sum of £12 8s., arrears of wages, paid to workers through the means of this office.