

practical test of Taranaki ironsand. At the time of writing it is almost assured that the amount of capital required to float a company to further develop and thoroughly test the Taranaki oil-fields will be subscribed. The present company will be absorbed by the new company. New and up-to-date boring plant will be obtained, and a refinery will be erected almost immediately to treat the large stock of crude petroleum at present on hand. The successful development of these important industries would prove of inestimable benefit to the town and district.

LABOUR.

The number of applications received for casual work has been comparatively few. Forty-seven men have been assisted to employment, 40 to private employment, and 7 to Government work. No difficulty was experienced in obtaining work in the country for any capable and willing man at road-formation, bushfelling, and other work of a kindred nature. Under the circumstances, it was only to be expected that it would be difficult to obtain men for milking and casual farm-work. Men cannot be expected to give up general labouring-work at from 8s. to 10s. per day of eight hours for farm-work and milking at from £1 to £1 10s. per week and found.

Although we are getting well on towards winter the number of applications for work does not show any increase in number. There is justification, therefore, in assuming that the prospects for the casual labourers as far as this district is concerned during the coming winter will prove fairly good.

FACTORIES ACT.

The provisions of this Act have been closely observed throughout the district. Employers generally show a willingness to comply with the provisions of the Act, and do not show any resentment at the responsibilities imposed upon them by its provisions, but, on the contrary, acknowledge that regulations and restrictions are required. It is very seldom that a deliberate breach of any of its provisions is discovered. There are, of course, many technical errors, due in most cases to ignorance of the provisions or to thoughtlessness by employers. During the year 230 factories were registered, in which 935 persons were employed—835 males and 100 females—as against 203 registered last year.

During the year 2,513 hours' overtime were worked by 114 women and boys.

Visits of inspection were paid to all the factories in the district, and to most of the factories in other parts of the province, including Patea, Hawera, Manaia, Normanby, Eltham, Stratford, Toko, Inglewood, Tariki, Waitara, Kaponga, Opunake, Okato, Urenui, Tarata, Whangamomona, and the smaller towns throughout the province.

The arrears of wages and overtime recovered for employees through the intervention of the Department during the year amounted to £23 15s.

Certificates of fitness were issued to 40 males and 29 females under the age of sixteen years, enabling them to work in factories.

ACCIDENTS.

There were 11 accidents reported; fortunately, none of these were of a serious nature, as they consisted principally of cuts and bruises due to carelessness in handling tools and appliances. None of the accidents could be attributed to defective machinery or plant. In all cases inquiries were made by me as to the cause of the accident, and in all cases employees were covered by insurance.

During my numerous visits to the factories of this district I have had exceptional opportunities of observing the conditions of employment, the welfare of the employees, and the relationship between the employers and employees. It is a pleasure to me to acknowledge that the utmost good feeling prevails; employers are always willing to do anything within reason for the comfort and convenience of their employees, and there are many evidences that their thoughtful consideration is appreciated. The wages paid to young persons employed are in most cases in excess of the amount specified in the Act; most of the workrooms are clean and well ventilated; and the sanitary arrangements are satisfactory.

Most of the butter and cheese and freezing and preserving works are an object-lesson as regards cleanliness and sanitation, and the employees evidently appreciate the necessity of keeping themselves and their surroundings in a clean and wholesome condition. There is room for improvement in this connection in many of the smaller bakehouses and butchers' small-goods rooms through the province.

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

During the year 274 shops were registered, employing 545 males and 240 females, as against 236 last year, employing 572 persons—424 males and 148 females. 976 hours' overtime has been worked. There have been 2 prosecutions under the Act. A large number of complaints have been investigated, and the sum of £21 1s. 3d., arrears of wages, was recovered for employees by this Department. No great difficulty has been experienced in administering this Act; in the majority of shops the hours worked are less than the number allowed, and the wages paid to young persons are in excess of the amount specified in the Act. The shop-holiday is closely observed, and is appreciated as much by the employer as the employee.

There are a large number of separate trades closing under requisition, and in some cases there are general requisitions in force with certain exemptions. It is an extremely difficult matter to decide where to draw the line in the enforcement of these requisitions where there are specified exemptions, particularly in small towns where there are a number of trades carried on in the same shop. In some of these general requisitions tobacconists, fruiterers, and confectioners are specially exempt, but the tobacconist sells stationery, sporting goods, musical instruments, and silver and plated ware, while the fruiterer or confectioner in many cases sells groceries and