

SESSION II.

1921.

NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR

(REPORT OF THE).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

The SECRETARY, Department of Labour, to the Hon. the MINISTER OF LABOUR.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wellington, 10th August, 1921.

I have the honour to present herewith the thirtieth annual report of this Department for the information of His Excellency the Governor-General, and to be laid before Parliament in compliance with the Labour Department and Labour Day Act, 1908, and the Factories Act, 1908. The report covers the financial year 1st April, 1920, to 31st March, 1921.

Owing to the shortage of paper and to the pressure of important work the report has been made as brief as possible.

I have, &c.,

F. W. ROWLEY,

Secretary of Labour.

The Hon. the Minister of Labour.

CONDITIONS OF TRADE AND EMPLOYMENT.

The reports from district offices show a reversal of the conditions mentioned last year, when it was stated that almost without exception there was a very general shortage of labour throughout the whole period, and that, notwithstanding a large number of orders, in many industries quite a considerable number of machines were idle. This position was maintained until about December, 1920, when evidence of overimportation and financial stringency began to appear, and as a result employment became less plentiful, although so far the ruling wages and high prices have not fallen to any great extent. Several factories, particularly those in the boot and shoe industry, and to a less degree in the clothing-manufacturing trade, in both of which many machines had for some time been idle through lack of labour, have found it necessary to decrease their staffs, and for the first time for many years there has been a tendency towards unemployment and reduced working-time. It is well known, however, that New Zealand is suffering less in this respect than most other countries. At the direction of the Government steps were immediately taken to cope with the situation so far as possible, and the Department's organization throughout the Dominion was utilized in receiving applications for work and in placing the men in suitable employment wherever it might be available. Special relief works were set aside in different districts, such as roadmaking of a useful but not urgent character. It is somewhat remarkable that a large proportion of the men have not accepted the employment offering, the wages offered were 10s. per day for single men and 12s. for married men, and most of them were given contract work, with the result that, for example, the average earnings at one of the works (contract and day labour) during a recent month were £3 16s. 9d. per week, out of which an average of £1 each was charged for the men's food on the job. The above position is shown from the fact that from the 21st May to the 23rd July, 1921, 1,654 men were sent to these works, of whom only 1,074 "turned up" and remained there.

It would seem, therefore, that the unemployment difficulty is not so great in New Zealand as was anticipated, and it is gratifying to say that the situation grows no worse, if it is not better, as the season proceeds. Already a demand is setting in for extra hands in the dairying industry, and farmers in both the North and the South are stated to be engaging in dairying and in the sowing of wheat, oats, &c., to a greater extent than usual, in place of growing wool and raising stock, thus leading to the employment of more labour.

The total number of engagements made at the men's employment bureaux during the year ended 31st March is 3,364 (previous year 4,205), with 1,806 dependants; 1,477 were sent to private employment and 1,887 to Government works. In addition 233 persons were assisted to their employment by reduced fares.

Women's Employment Bureaux.—At the end of last year, as it was considered that the number of engagements made by these bureaux had not for several years justified the expenditure involved, it was decided to close them as separate offices. Any business offering is now carried on at the men's bureaux.