

To show how far the Labour Disputes Investigation Act has been successful in settling disputes without the workers feeling the necessity of having recourse to strikes, it may be pointed out that of forty-two disputes dealt with since the inception of this Act in 1914—nine years ago—a settlement was reached under the procedure set out therein in every instance except one, and in this a settlement was subsequently reached by means of an award under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act. Only four ballots were found necessary, three resulting in favour of a strike and one against. Even in the cases where strikes were decided upon by ballot they did not eventuate. In two instances only was there interruption of work—viz., a ten-days strike and a “go-slow” policy. One of these occurred before the dispute was filed and investigated, and the other was during the investigation. In both these cases the dispute was settled.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION ACT.

Fifty-five cases were heard and determined by the Court of Arbitration, none of which calls for special mention.

A consolidating and amending Workers' Compensation Act, was passed during the session of 1922, of which the following are the principal amendments : (1.) The percentage of the average weekly earnings payable by way of compensation in cases of incapacity is increased from 55 per cent. to 58 per cent. (2.) The amount of damages that may be obtained from an employer by a worker who has been injured through the negligence of a fellow-worker (in common employment) has been increased from £750 to £1,000. (3.) A domestic servant is brought within the Act if the period of employment is three days. The period was previously seven days.

It is generally recognized that on the whole the New Zealand Act makes better provision for the workers than those of other countries. An investigation of the various Acts in force elsewhere is being made, however, in order to see how far such is the case, and to ascertain whether any of the provisions examined could with advantage be recommended for adoption in New Zealand.

SHEARERS' ACCOMMODATION ACT, 1919.

The administration of this Act has now been taken over by the Department of Agriculture, whose Inspectors have greater facilities for carrying out country inspections.

AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS' ACCOMMODATION (INCLUDING ACCOMMODATION FOR FLAX AND SAWMILL WORKERS).

Visits of inspection under the Act for sawmill and flaxmill workers were made in conjunction with the inspection of the mills under the Factories Act. In several cases requisitions were served on proprietors for increased or improved accommodation, resulting in better conditions being provided for the workers affected.

SCAFFOLDING INSPECTION ACT.

Number of notices of intention to erect scaffolding over 16 ft. in height, 1,649; increase over previous year, 703. This is easily the highest number of notices received during any one year. The following figures showing the number of notices of intention to erect scaffolding over 16 ft. in height received from 1914 to date are interesting in that they show the decrease in building operations during the war years and the increases since that time: 1913-14, 1,488; 1914-15, 1,453; 1915-16, 937; 1916-17, 888; 1917-18, 706; 1918-19, 666; 1919-20, 897; 1920-21, 955; 1921-22, 946; 1922-23, 1,649.

Number of inspections, 5,288, which is almost double that of the previous year.

A great advance has been made during the last three or four years in methods of construction, particularly in respect of buildings of the larger type involving the use of mechanical power and improved scaffolding and hoisting gear of various kinds. This has placed greater responsibilities on the Inspectors, and necessitates closer supervision. During the past year in Wellington alone eighteen buildings in course of erection were 60 ft. or over in height.

Accidents, 145; increase over last year, thirty-nine. Of these four were fatal (last year, three), and three others were of a serious nature. The fatal accidents were as follows: (1.) A worker fell from a platform 14½ ft. high whilst demolishing the scaffold. (2.) An elderly man who was making alterations to his own dwelling fell from a height of 8 ft. (3.) A worker scratched his hand on old roofing-iron, causing blood-poisoning. (4.) A worker selected a faulty piece of timber for use in raising the ridge of a roof. The timber broke, one piece striking him on the head, causing fracture of the skull. None of the fatal accidents was due to faulty scaffolding or gear.

Prosecutions under this Act, twenty-nine. In all cases fines imposed. These are in addition to cases taken by the Inspection of Machinery Department, which is responsible for the supervision of power-driven machinery on buildings.

During the year the Act was superseded by a new Scaffolding and Excavation Act, and new regulations were prepared, which came into force on the 17th May of this year. The principal alterations in the new Act and regulations are:—

(1.) The provisions of the Act are extended to cover all operations in connection with the erection, demolition, or alteration of buildings (instead of merely where scaffoldings are used), also excavations for foundations of buildings or for sewerage, gas, water, or electric supply where such work is more than 5 ft. in depth. The Act does not, however, apply to excavations made directly by any local authority or public body, or to any tramway.