

1895.

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, 26th June, 1895.

I have the honour to present herewith the fourth annual report of this department. It covers the late financial year—viz., from the 1st April, 1894, to the 31st March, 1895. It is not brought up to the present date, as some time has necessarily been taken up in compiling returns into statistical tables.

I have, &c.,

EDWARD TREGAR, Secretary.

The Hon. W. P. Reeves, Minister of Labour.

LABOUR.

The general depression of trade all over the world has not passed by without affecting considerably the position of working-men and -women in New Zealand. The low price of most colonial products was in some degree balanced by the greater output in many directions, but in some there was a falling-off in amount so serious as to affect greatly not only the income of employers but their power of giving work to others. The harvest was in good quality; but its quantity was small, owing to the small area of land put down in crop. Wool and frozen-meat brought such low quotations in the Home market as to have a most depressing effect upon farmers and owners of stock, while many runholders, who had obtained advances on the security of their clip, found themselves with a deficit to supply on receipt of their sale-notes. The small quantity of grain, &c., carried on the Government railways caused the revenue from that source to fall below the average. From these causes has resulted an unusual depression in the labour market, and a corresponding difficulty in finding employment. In New Zealand the unskilled labourers consist of two classes, the floating and the permanent. The permanent labourers are settlers who, while cultivating their holdings, or, perhaps, only their gardens, are, in the country, grouped in villages or near stations. They provide the general, agricultural, and pastoral labour, and are to be relied upon in case any of their richer neighbours wish to employ them. In town these men are householders, usually residing in the suburbs, and there they carry on the occupations which the requirements of cities demand. This year, however, the difficulty of providing for the other class—the floating or unstable bodies of workmen—has been augmented by the addition to their numbers of many settlers and others hitherto belonging to the permanent labourers. These, under pressure of the scarcity of money, have recruited the ranks of the wanderers, and helped to swell the number of the unemployed. The skilled trades have also contributed their quota, boilermakers, painters, printers, &c., stepping down into the ranks of untrained labour for the sake of employment on road-works or in railway construction.

Although the above remarks present a true picture of the state of affairs during last year, I am glad to be able to report that with the new financial year the tide of business has again commenced to flow, and that probably the depression is over. There are signs of a steady though gentle upward tendency in prices, and employment is not so difficult to obtain as it was some months ago. The rise in the price of wheat is causing large areas of land to be prepared for the sowing of grain. The mining industry is reviving; and the large yields of gold coming to the surface are inducing capital from older countries to flow into Auckland and the West Coast. Wool has risen in price; and the market for frozen-mutton and chilled-beef looks healthier than it has done for some time. Factories that were working half-time, or short-handed, are now filling again with hands, and the outlook generally is more cheerful.

During the hot dry summers of Australia many of its inhabitants formerly took advantage of the short distance between that island and New Zealand to visit us in search of a cooler climate