

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

AUCKLAND.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Auckland, 27th April, 1904.

I have the honour to forward for your information my annual report on the working of the various branches of this Department for the year ending the 31st March last.

LABOUR.

During the year, 829 men have been assisted to work, of whom 216 were married, with 839 dependent upon them, and 613 were single; 469 were sent to Government works and 360 to private employment. In addition, twenty-one wives (with thirty-six children) were also assisted to join their husbands where working.

The number of those sent to private employment being 272 in excess of the number sent last year is an indication that private employers are becoming more conversant with the advantages of applying to this Department for workers.

As in preceding years, applications for work from skilled workers were, as a rule, limited to new arrivals—local competent workmen being generally well employed.

During the year a fair supply of labour has been open, so that suitable workmen were in good demand. There has been an influx of workers from the Australian Colonies, America, and Europe. Robust men used to country-work were soon employed. There were, however, a good number seeking town and light work; in many instances with little or no experience, and physically incapable of hard manual labour. Such men find it difficult to get a start. I think it is a mistake for this class (who probably give up work at which they make a livelihood, and leave the place where they have friends to assist them) to come to a place where their sphere is naturally very limited.

FACTORIES.

Since its inception the Factories Act has been in general favour, and is now considered a great success. The cordiality with which it is supported by employers renders the work of a Factory Inspector pleasant and easy. With, I think, a corresponding benefit to all concerned, there has been a complete revolution of hitherto existing conditions under which workers laboured.

There were 1,167 factories registered for the year, employing 10,384 hands—viz., 7,458 males and 2,926 females—an increase on the previous year of 124 factories and 1,017 employees (904 males and 113 females). This return does not include the railway workshops, where a large number of workers is employed.

Five hundred and ninety permits to work in factories were issued to young persons under sixteen years of age—boys, 282; girls, 308. Of the boys, 107 had passed Standard IV., 82 Standard V., and 93 Standard VI.; and of the girls, 131 had passed Standard IV., 102 Standard V., and 75 Standard VI.

Although overtime has not been on the increase, being somewhat less than for last year, still it is carried on to a considerable extent. As I reported on former occasions, I think it would entail hardship on employers if this class of work were altogether prohibited, as there are seasons and times when it is almost an impossibility for manufacturers to meet demands within the ordinary working-time, and extra workers are not available. The check is to keep the remuneration for such work up to a scale which will tend to prohibit overtime being asked for except in the most urgent cases. Warrants were issued to 1,417 females and forty-nine boys, who worked 45,751 hours. This is an increase in the number of hours worked and by less hands, which is attributable to the summer setting in so late. [For return of overtime see page 16.]

One hundred and forty-four accidents were reported and inquired into. A youth was killed by a falling block, one man was struck in the abdomen whilst putting a belt on to a driving-wheel with a stick, one man fell from a fire-escape outside a factory, and a youth was killed by a descending lift in a warehouse. One accident (by the fall of stacks of raw sugar) injured ten men, four of them seriously, one having his spine injured, one his shoulder-blade fractured, and two each a leg broken. Of the other accidents, in two cases it was necessary to amputate a thumb, and in five cases either one or two fingers. None of the remainder were of a serious nature, being mostly slight cuts and bruises. With the exception of the man who was killed when shifting a belt (which was attributable to faulty machinery, the mechanical belt-shifter having been removed for repairs), none of these accidents could properly be deemed working-accidents, as the boy who was killed by a falling block was at the time at play swinging on the tackle which let down the block; the man who fell from the fire-escape chose that way to get into the workroom instead of the ordinary doorway; and the youth killed by the lift was at a warehouse, where he was looking over the protecting-bar for some reason not explained and his head was caught, and upon being extricated his reliever unfortunately lost hold of him, and the victim was precipitated to the bottom of the lift-well (a considerable distance), which caused his death. In all the minor cases the occurrences were purely accidental, and might possibly have been avoided by more care from the workers.

Seven charges for breaches of the Factories Act were preferred against five employers. Convictions were obtained in six cases, and in the other case judgment was confessed, and the matter settled by the employer refunding the moneys in question.