

UNSKILLED LABOUR.

Year by year the unskilled-labour market presents a much more pleasing aspect; we have practically no difficulty in placing the bulk of *bonâ fide* unemployed, either in private employment or on some of the public works of the colony. We have had quite a number of unskilled labourers from the other colonies; many of them have been assisted and directed into districts where employment could be found. Two hundred and fifty-eight men, with 305 persons depending on them, have been sent to employment through this office during the year—namely, 74 married and 184 single: 172 married and 99 single less than for last year.

FATORIES.

The Factories Act is, comparatively speaking, one of the easiest and most satisfactory we have to administer; every section of the Act is so well defined that there is little chance of a dual construction being put upon it. The annual increases in wages to persons under twenty years of age naturally affects those who through ineptitude cannot qualify themselves for the increased rate, but these are very few. There have been several instances where the annual increases have not been paid on due date, but when the employer's attention has been drawn to the omission the arrears were paid forthwith. In most instances the oversight was the fault of the person in charge of the department, and not of the employers themselves. Several new and improved factory buildings have been erected during the year, also new iron fire-escape staircases with doors opening outwards on to the landings. A considerable number of sanitary improvements have also been effected.

This year 1,091 factories have been registered in this district, employing 10,742 hands—namely, 7,350 males and 3,392 females. 2,218 women and young persons under sixteen years of age and 617 males over sixteen years of age have worked overtime. [For table see page 16.]

Four hundred and fifty-five certificates have been issued to young persons under sixteen years of age—viz., 214 males and 241 females.

One hundred and twenty-three accidents have been reported during the year, none of which have been fatal, the most serious being that of a master joiner who lost the four fingers of his right hand on a band saw in his own workroom. There have also been forty accidents reported from the Government Workshops at Addington, none of which were serious.

There have been fifteen convictions under the Act during the year, and one case was dismissed.

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT AND ITS AMENDMENTS.

These Acts work remarkably well. I adhere to my previously expressed opinion that all shops not exempted under the Act should close on the same day; and the provisions which apply to assistants in exempted shops, hotel-bars, banks, offices, &c., should be more clearly defined and made easier to administer.

There have been ten convictions under this Act during the year. Permits have been given to work overtime to thirteen males, who worked ninety-one hours, and to 121 females, who worked 1,498 hours.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

This Act could be much more satisfactorily administered if the license-holders were compelled to give receipts for fees received from both employers and servants. There have been two prosecutions against the same registry-office keeper; penalties of £5 and £2 and costs were imposed, with two indorsements on the license—this was for charging excessive fees. With this exception the Act has worked smoothly.

INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION ACTS.

The Amendment Act of last session having made it mandatory for Inspectors of Factories to enforce awards, it naturally brings with it increased responsibility, requiring prudence and carefulness in dealing with industrial difficulties which arise from time to time. In some instances omissions will occur through inadvertence on one side or the other, and where such is the case, and the Department is satisfied that the omission is not wilful and the offending party is willing to put things right, the duty of the Department is easy; but in all cases where a deliberate breach of any award or industrial agreement has been committed the Department has only one course open, and that is to bring the case before the Arbitration Court.

I have investigated sixty-five cases of alleged breaches of awards during the year. I have had three cases before the Arbitration Court, and in each case the decision of the Court was in favour of the Department, the employers being ordered to pay up arrears of wages. In many of the other cases that have come under my notice arrears of wages and overtime have been paid, and in others wages have been adjusted to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. There are twelve charges of breaches of awards awaiting the next sitting of the Arbitration Court.

In closing, I again acknowledge my indebtedness to both employers and employees for the kindly courtesy I have invariably received at their hands.

I have, &c.,
JOHN LOMAS,
Inspector of Factories.

Edward Tregear, Esq., Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.