

INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION ACTS.

The administration of these Acts and the enforcement of awards and industrial agreements are perhaps the most difficult and complex duties of the Inspector's office.

Two hundred and fifty-two breaches and alleged breaches have been investigated by myself and the Assistant Inspector, Mr. Hally, during the year. After careful inquiry we found that 174 of the alleged breaches were unfounded. Thirty-six other cases were of such a nature that when investigated it was considered either an oversight or that a mistake had been made. In omissions of this character the employers received a warning, and wherever arrears of wages were due the full amount was recovered through the medium of the Department and paid to the employees. The sum of £154 13s. 2d. has been collected in this manner without undue feeling or friction being manifested by either party.

Forty breaches of a more serious nature have been adjudicated upon by the Court; convictions were obtained in 35 cases, 2 were withdrawn, and 3 were dismissed.

Twenty-three of these cases were conducted by the Assistant Inspector, who is a very judicious, hardworking, and diligent officer.

There are also thirteen breaches of awards awaiting the attention of the Court.

There is no doubt that we should have far less of these unpleasant duties, and the Court would be relieved of a great deal of unnecessary work, if employers would only take a little more pains to familiarise themselves with the awards and industrial agreements under which they are working, as in almost every instance ignorance of the law has been pleaded as an excuse for the offences.

Perhaps the most serious difficulty that has come under our notice during the year was the dispute between the Tailoresses' Union and the local manufacturers which resulted in a number of employees being idle for several weeks. At the present time only about three of these girls are still unemployed.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

This year five new licenses have been issued and five offices have ceased to exist, leaving nineteen offices that are still doing business in the district. No complaints of a serious character have come under my notice, and in my opinion these offices are well conducted.

In concluding my report I desire to acknowledge the uniform courtesy I have experienced at the hands of all those that my duties have brought me in contact with; also to thank the members of my own staff for their great willingness to assist me in the discharge of my various duties.

I have, &c.,

JOHN LOMAS,

Inspector of Factories.

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

WHANGAREI.

SIR,—

Police Station, Whangarei, 8th April, 1906.

I beg to report having registered fifty-eight factories during the year ending the 31st March, 1906, in which 332 males and forty-eight females were employed.

There have been no prosecutions for breaches of the Factories Act during the year.

Two shopkeepers were convicted and fined for employing assistants after the prescribed hours; and for failing to close on the statutory half-holiday one shopkeeper was convicted and fined.

The labour laws appear to be working smoothly, and giving every satisfaction to a large majority of workers, also to employers.

The town has been making slow but steady progress during the year. Several large brick buildings have been erected, and there are rumours of other contracts being let in the near future.

Men in the building trade have been fully employed.

Dressmakers and tailors have been very busy during the year, and employers in both trades have found it a hard matter to get suitable girls.

Drapers, grocers, saddlers, bootmakers, coachbuilders, and plumbers have been doing a fairly good business, and there is every prospect of trade increasing. All hands in these trades are fully employed.

There are two flax-mills and one sawmill in the borough; all are working full time. Some of the small flax-mills in the district have closed down, and are being removed to other parts.

Unskilled labour: All local men fully employed. I have had very few applications for work from local men during the year, most of the men sent to the co-operative works at Grahamtown being strangers. Some thirty or forty men are required on the Hukerenui Railway extension-works, and at present I do not think that there is any chance of getting anything like that number locally.

A private contractor at Kiripaka, some ten miles from here, is advertising for good pick-and-shovel men.

The gumfields continue to employ a large number of men. Most of these men are aged, and men unable to do hard work. The majority earn fair wages, but they seem to be all of the unfortunate class. When they get a few pounds together they come into town and squander it in drink and get locked up, and when all their money is gone they go back to the gumfields again and the same thing occurs over and over again.

A large number of Austrians are also employed on the gumfields. Several Austrians have taken up sections on the gumfields, and I am informed that they make excellent settlers. Some of the young men are employed on the co-operative works, and in nearly every case they prove to be good steady workmen.

I have, &c.,

THOS. J. DRAKE,

Inspector of Factories.

The Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.