

UNSKILLED LABOUR.

I have had a good deal of trouble with this portion of my duties during the period. Four hundred and five persons applied for work, and 155 of that number were sent to co-operative employment and to private work. A great number of these men came from the Australian Colonies to this district for harvest, but not being able to get work came to this office, many of them without money.

In conclusion, I beg to say that the provisions of the various Acts have received from me a good deal of attention, and I am satisfied that the law governing employer and employee has been fairly carried out with as little hardship to all concerned as possible.

Edward Tregear, Esq., Secretary for Labour, Wellington.

I have, &c.,

THOMAS O'GRADY.

INVERCARGILL.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Invercargill, 13th April, 1906.

I have the honour to submit my report for the year ending the 31st ultimo.

The period under review has been very satisfactory. With two exceptions, trade has been well maintained, and employment in nearly every branch of industry has been plentiful. The building trade has been exceptionally busy in all branches, and there has been an almost continuous demand for skilled artisans. Sash, door, and joinery works have also been busy throughout the year. The engineering and boilermaking trades have not been so busy as they were last year, though employment has been fairly regular. The proprietors of one large foundry, to keep their staff fully employed, started range and grate making; and, as the innovation has been so successful, there is no doubt about its forming a permanent branch of their business. Agricultural-implement making has improved, and the number of hands employed increased. The proprietor of the largest business in that line here is doubling the size of his factory premises, so there is reason to believe that he anticipates a much larger increase of trade. The boot and shoe trade was exceptionally quiet for several months, and the hands made little more than half-time, but it picked up again, and has been busy now for some time, and I am informed there is every prospect of its continuing so. Coach and carriage builders have had a very satisfactory year, and I understand there has been no lost time through slackness of trade. Furniture-factories have been practically full-handed, and there was very little lost time through slackness of trade. Tailors and dressmakers have also had a good year; the amount of overtime worked in these trades shows a considerable increase compared with last year's returns. The men in bush sawmills have been fully employed, and at no time of the year have I heard of good men being out of work. The flax-milling industry continues to find employment for a large number of unskilled men, who, in many instances, would be unfit for such work as pick-and-shovel; they make fairly good wages during the greater part of the year, but I do not think the business has been so good this year as it was last, as many beds of flax have been cut out. Still there has been a good demand for men, and in two instances, at least, mills were compelled to close down through scarcity of labour. At no time of the year has there been any "unemployed" difficulty, and during a great part of the year it has been difficult to supply the men required, especially was this the case in regard to farm hands.

During the year 217 men have been assisted to work. Of these 138 were single and 79 married, having 295 persons depending on them. Sixty-six were sent to private employment, and 151 to Government co-operative works.

FACORIES ACT.

There are 257 factories and workrooms registered here, employing 2,004 persons—viz., 1,599 males and 405 females; these figures show slight increases on last year's returns.

Permits were issued under section 26 to twenty-one girls and twenty-six boys to work in factories.

The amount of overtime worked by males over sixteen years of age was 10,777 hours, and by females and boys under sixteen years of age 9,741; this is an increase on the amount of overtime worked by females of nearly 2,000 hours, and a decrease of that worked by males of a little over 1,000 hours.

Thirteen accidents were reported and inquired into, an increase of two on the previous year, though, with the exception of one, that of a young man who lost an arm in a scutcher, none of them were of a serious nature.

The Act generally is working well, and there were no prosecutions of any factory registered in Invercargill, though I laid two charges against a baker registered at Gore for failing to pay wages fortnightly, and convictions were recorded on each charge.

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

This Act is now working fairly well, although when the Amendment Act of last year, which limited the working-hours of assistants was brought into operation there were numerous complaints from employers of labour, not, however, against the early closing, but that they considered it unfair that they were practically compelled to close at 9 p.m. on Saturday, whilst others who had members of their own families assisting in their businesses could remain open. However, that trouble has almost disappeared.

The grocers and drapers have a notice under section 21 gazetted fixing closing-hours for their respective trades, so that now all grocers and drapers in the Borough of Invercargill close their shops at 6 p.m. on four nights of the week and 9 p.m. on Saturday. Ironmongers, jewellers, and watchmakers have for years, by mutual agreement, observed the same hours, so that the Act has not affected them in that respect. The chemists have their closing-hours fixed by *Gazette* notice. Fancy-goods dealers and stationers have mutually agreed to close at 6 p.m. on four nights of the week and 10 p.m. on Saturday, though in this instance some of the shopkeepers have not fallen into line with the majority, and their shops remain open after the others have closed.