

seem to have any ambition or desire to settle anywhere. At the beginning of the year there were an unusual number of unemployed in the town. Subscriptions were received by the Mayor and local bodies, and work was provided for a number of men at the recreation grounds; private citizens also employed a number in gardening and other work; while authority was received to send a number of suitable men to bushfelling work at Waitotara and the Stratford-Ongarue railway-works. This depression was of very short duration, and for the remainder of the year labour conditions have been very regular, the supply of labour being about equal to the demand. Although very few men have been employed on Government work, the applications for employment during the last few months have been fewer than at similar periods in previous years. The difficulty of obtaining enough milkers has not been so great this year, which fact is due to some extent to the installation of a very large number of milking-machines. These machines are becoming very popular, as, in addition to doing more work as efficiently as the human milker, they relieve the dairy-farmer from the anxiety of obtaining and retaining labour for this work.

Although there are very few men out of work at present I may add that there is very little general labouring-work offering in the district.

FACTORIES ACT.

There were 194 factories registered in New Plymouth district during the year. There were 2,508 hours' overtime worked by women and boys under the age of sixteen years.

During the year 1,500 visits of inspection were paid—861 to factories in New Plymouth district, and 639 to factories in the other towns of the province.

There have been 30 prosecutions and convictions under this Act, and 17 cases in which there were arrears of wages and overtime amounting to £93 16s. In all these cases the amount due was paid when called upon, consequently no further action was taken.

In addition to the foregoing, a large number of complaints were investigated, most of which were without foundation, or quite outside the scope of this Department. Very little difficulty has been experienced this year in connection with the observance of the weekly half-holiday for women and boys in factories. There are still some employers, however, who cannot understand why it is necessary, for instance, to give their female factory employees Thursday (the weekly half-holiday), and also Good Friday in the same week, while it is only necessary to give their shop-assistants one of these days; it takes a great deal of explaining to make them understand the difference between the provisions of the Factories Act and Shops and Offices Act. The holiday is very closely observed throughout the province.

Certificates of fitness enabling young persons to work in factories were granted to 14 boys and 10 girls. During the year 7 accidents were reported; fortunately none of these were of a serious nature, and none could be attributed to want of care on the part of the employers in supplying proper safeguards to machinery. Most of these accidents were due to the carelessness of the employees; they become so familiar with the machines they use that they will take all sorts of stupid risks, and sooner or later they pay the penalty.

I have had exceptional opportunities during my numerous visits to the factories and workrooms throughout the province of observing the conditions of employment, the welfare of the employees, and the relationship between the employees and employers. It is a pleasure to be able to report that the utmost good feeling prevails between employer and employees; employers generally are always willing to do anything reasonable for the comfort and encouragement of their employees, and there are many evidences that this thoughtful consideration is appreciated.

Although most of the workrooms are small in comparison with those in large cities, they are in many cases well equipped with machinery, the power for which is obtained either from water or from the extensive use of generated electricity in the form of electric motors.

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

During the year 233 shops were registered, employing 340 persons—228 males and 112 females.

Very little overtime has been worked, the total amount for all employees being 735 hours.

There were three prosecutions under the Act.

Although no great difficulty has been experienced in administering this Act, it necessitates constant vigilance, more particularly where a number of trades are closing under "requisition" under which different hours are fixed by the majority of the shopkeepers, ranging from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. on ordinary week-nights. In cases where the time has been exceeded I have found in most cases that the irregularities have been due to either forgetfulness on the part of the shopkeepers or the volubility of their customers.

The weekly half-holiday is very closely observed; indeed, most of the employers look forward with quite as much pleasure to the holiday as their employees. When the amendment providing for a compulsory half-holiday for hotel employees was introduced, some objection was raised by hotel-keepers; experience has proved, however, that the holiday can be granted with very little inconvenience.

The provision in the Act prohibiting the sale of tobacco, cigars, and cigarettes by storekeepers and others after the hours when tobacconists are required to close by "requisition," was very necessary in the interest of the tobacconists. It is very difficult to enforce the provision, however, as there are so many shopkeepers who stock these goods, and who do not close at the same hours as the tobacconists, so that it is quite impossible to keep them always under close supervision. It is one matter to know that there are constant breaches of this section going on, but it is a much more difficult matter to prove it.