

PALMERSTON NORTH.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Palmerston North, 19th April, 1910.

I have the honour to submit to you my annual report of matters coming within the jurisdiction of the Palmerston North district office of the Department of Labour for the year ending 31st March, 1910.

THE TRADE AND LABOUR MARKET, ETC.

The year just concluded has been a quiet one, but has been a slight improvement upon the last year. The confidence which was lacking during the year 1908-9 seems to have been restored, and although consumers have been very careful in the expenditure of money, still there has not been the same complaint of universal depression so often heard during the previous year. The prospects for the future are fairly bright, especially as regards new buildings, for an epidemic of fires—in one instance as many as eight in one week—has made openings which, although costly to the insurance companies and inconvenient to the occupiers of the buildings destroyed, must prove beneficial to workers in the building trades.

Skilled labour has been in fair demand, and work has been very satisfactory.

The overtime worked has been about the same as last year.

Engineering, flax-milling, and the frozen-meat trade have been perhaps the busiest: for example, no less than 5,325 hours' overtime has been worked at one freezing-works among about fifty men.

Tailors, tailoresses, and dressmakers have also had a busy year, and again I have to note the difficulty some employers have had in obtaining girls in these trades.

I also desire to state that, as in the rest of New Zealand, there is still a big opening in Palmerston North for domestic servants.

During the past year the number of unemployed persons has been slightly less than the previous year, which is, of course, satisfactory to the Department. Genuine cases have mostly been provided for, and in this connection I desire to specially record the good work done by Mr. Aisher, the relieving officer of Palmerston North, who in many cases has acted in conjunction with this office.

Once again I regret that the employers do not take the advantage that they should do of the Department in seeking labour. I am of opinion that a great majority of them will only be persuaded to study their own interests and the interests of workers they engage when licensed registry offices are a thing of the past. But of this I am writing more in the paragraph which comes under the head of "Servants' Registry Offices Act."

For the year just ended 212 persons, with 252 dependants, applied to this office for employment. Work was found for 195 men, with 228 dependants, most of whom were sent to private employment. 195 railway-fares, of a total value of £62 17s. 3d., were issued to unemployed persons seeking work, and of this amount only £6 14s. 9d. is outstanding, while of this sum £5 5s. 1d. is guaranteed.

During the year the Borough Council has issued 154 building-permits, of which 41 were for new buildings, and 113 for alterations and additions. The total value of the new buildings and alterations was £21,725. The expenditure of the Council during the year, which includes wages for labour (£8,221), was £42,733. The Council have during the year built a dam retaining 1,500,000 gallons, which has been constructed in such a manner that it can be raised to a height of 50 ft., and made capable of retaining 20,000,000 gallons. Upon this scheme of improvement some £40,000 has been spent, and a further sum of £16,000 is required to provide sufficient water for a population of 25,000. £534 was spent in improvements to the gardens in the Square, and £222 in extra labour at the cemetery. The balance of wages was distributed for streets, sanitary work, reserves, and sewerage.

Flax-mills.—Perhaps the most important industry affecting this district is the hemp industry. The flax-mills are now in good swing, and with the new award just made the conditions of employment should be satisfactory. I have already sent you some photographs of the largest flax-mill in the Dominion, which I hope you will publish. They are not only of interest as showing the value of the industry, but should be useful as drawing attention to a factory well worth a visit, and an example of how employers can cater for the comfort of employees if they so determine.

FACORIES ACT.

There have been 254 factories registered during the year, an increase of 5 over last year. The number employed has been 1,571, and the amount paid in wages exceeds £87,000.

Certificates of fitness to work in factories have been issued to 63 young persons under sixteen years of age—37 males and 26 females.

Overtime warrants were issued to 21 workrooms for 156 boys under sixteen and females to work 3,856 hours.

There have been 20 accidents reported during the year, but none of them may be said to have been serious, and in no case has the accident been due to any neglect on the part of the employer.

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

During the year 293 shops have been entered upon the register, which is an increase of 76 over last year. The number employed has been 758, and the wages paid exceeded £41,000.

Overtime has been worked at 15 shops by 124 employees, the hours numbering 932.

PROSECUTIONS (FACORIES AND SHOPS).

There have been 43 prosecutions under the Shops and Offices and Factories Acts during the year; 42 convictions were recorded, and 1 case was dismissed. Fines were imposed amounting to £23 5s., and costs £12 2s.