

The sawmilling industry remains in a very unsatisfactory condition. Most of the mills have been working for the greater part of the year with reduced hands. Employers generally complain of the scarcity of orders. There has been a considerable decrease in the export of timber for this year, the figures for the year ending 31st March, 1909, being 43,986,671 superficial feet. For the year ending 31st March, 1910, there were 30,461,390 superficial feet exported.

MEN'S EMPLOYMENT BRANCH.

Owing to the completion of various public works in the earlier part of the period it was difficult to deal with the large number of applicants for employment. During the year skilled and unskilled workers to the number of 426 were assisted by the Department, 288 being sent to Government works, and 138 to private employment. Towards the end of the period a circular was sent out to all employers, setting forth the objects of the Employment Branch, and it was surprising to find the number of employers who were unaware of the advantages to be gained through the bureau. The idea seemed to prevail that this office is some kind of a charitable institution, but by careful selection of the men asked for, and strict attention to the requirements of the employers, this idea is being eradicated.

FACTORIES ACT.

I am pleased to say the period has been one of general satisfaction to employers and employees. Visits of inspection have been paid to all the factories in this district. Special attention has been paid to the sanitary arrangements, and to the matter of cleanliness, and where improvements have been required very little trouble has been experienced in getting factory-owners to comply with my requests. A number of new and up-to-date factory buildings have been erected during the year, and in all cases the occupiers have endeavoured to comply with the provisions of the Act so far as the structure is concerned.

During the year 143 factories were registered, employing a total of 820 persons—namely, 657 males and 163 females. Although this does not show any increase in the number of factories registered over the previous year, it cannot be said to be indicative of no progress having been made in this direction. In most cases the factories already existing have greatly increased their number of hands, but we should add to this the fact that a number of sawmills in the country have been obliged to close down, otherwise the returns would show a decided increase so far as the town is concerned.

Certificates of fitness to young persons to work in factories were issued to 12 boys and 2 girls; 122 women and boys worked overtime to the extent of 6,672 hours.

Thirteen accidents have been reported; 1 was fatal (caused by a man falling on a circular saw), and 2 were of a serious nature. The remaining 10 were slight. In all cases inquiries were made, and where the accidents were caused by machinery, all possible steps were taken to have the same properly guarded. In some cases employers are very lax in providing efficient guards for machinery, and the most flimsy pretext is called a guard; the use of proper guards would certainly have the desired effect of reducing the number of accidents. I intend to give continued attention to this important matter, and to report any future cases of laxity to the Inspector of Machinery.

There were 2 prosecutions under this Act during the year, and convictions were recorded and fines inflicted in both cases. A number of cases have been settled out of Court; and where the default had occurred through non-payment of back wages, or wages for overtime, the amounts due to the employees have in all cases been recovered and paid through this Department to the workers concerned.

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

During the year 170 shops have been placed on the register.

The Act generally is well observed, and when provision is made in the Act, as I hope it will be before long, for shopkeepers to keep time and wages books in same way as for factories, it will be less difficult to deal with the hours and wages of assistants.

During the year 6 breaches of the Act were dealt with by the Stipendiary Magistrate's Court, and convictions obtained in 5 cases.

There were 274 hours overtime worked by 23 employees.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

There is only one office registered under the Act. It is conducted in a satisfactory manner by a competent and experienced person.

INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION ACT.

With the exception of the dispute at Otira Tunnel last August, which was amicably settled through the instrumentality of the Conciliation Commissioner (Mr. P. Hally), no serious difficulties have arisen in this district. It is also noticeable that the feeling between the representatives of the employers and employees is of a commendable character, and, as a result, most of the complaints have been obviated, and disputes have been arranged without reference to the Court.

There were 5 cases taken before the Court, convictions being recorded in 4 cases, and 1 dismissed.

CONCLUSION.

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

I have, &c.,

HENRY E. MOSTON,

Inspector of Factories.

The Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.