

WELLINGTON.

SIR,—

Department of Labour (Women's Branch), Wellington, 18th April, 1910.

I beg to report on the working of the local Women's Branch for the year ending 31st March, 1910.

The establishment of the office is now widely known, and a very fair measure of success is to be reported for the year. There has been, with few exceptions, an unsatisfied demand for all classes of domestic workers. Applications have also been made to a considerable extent by employers for female workers for manufacturing industries.

During the twelve months under review 1,438 applications were received from employers and 1,304 from women workers. The engagements totalled 795, but, excluding those assisted more than once, there were actually 748 persons who were found employment through the agency of the office, or an average of 62 per month. This monthly average of 62 just equals the number dealt with during the same period for the year 1908-9. Although it is somewhat disappointing that an increasing average cannot be reported, it must be borne in mind that the tendency is for domestic labour to get scarcer and scarcer as time goes on, and the problem grows more complex and more difficult of solution from day to day. It is not unusual for the number of employers seeking domestics to outnumber the girls offering by eight to one.

As mentioned in my last report, applicants still favour employment governed by an award of the Arbitration Court, for the reason that the pay, hours, and overtime rates are clearly defined. If domestic service could be placed on some such system whereby the conditions of employment were made more definite, it would tend, I believe, to attract many more girls to take it up.

The "domestics" difficult to place are generally those classing themselves as housekeepers, housemaids, lady-helps, and charwomen. In the latter case there are, unfortunately, from month to month, more applicants than there is work for. The charwomen mainly desire work by the day, and they are usually composed of widowed women or of women supporting invalided husbands. It is unfortunate that there is not more work offering in this connection, as some of the applicants find only a very precarious livelihood.

The oversea steamers have been regularly met on arrival in Wellington, and information and advice has been afforded to the girls as to their prospects for employment, and, although very few of them apply to the office directly after landing, it has been shown that they regard the Department's assistance highly, in that many of them call for help after they have been settled in the Dominion for some time.

Employers are rather inclined to urge upon the Department both in and out of season the advisability of bringing girls from the Old Country in shiploads to meet their needs. It should be remembered, however, that the domestic-servant question is becoming just as difficult a problem in the Old Land as it is in this Dominion, and good and capable girls there can command ready situations. In my opinion, the girls are available in New Zealand, and the remedy lies with employers themselves. It is not unusual for some girls to stay in one place for years, simply for the reason that the conditions of employment and pay are fair and reasonable; and if, as I have already suggested, some systematic scheme could be propounded by which the girls would receive reasonable conditions of employment, and the promise of an annual holiday, much of the aversion now expressed against the work would be removed.

Much feeling has at times been shown by employers at the failure of the Department to supply domestics promptly, not recognising, of course, that, after all, the girls themselves are limited in number, and therefore particular and peculiar in the selection of a place. But generally the places available have been filled to the mutual satisfaction of both parties, and it is pleasing to acknowledge the gratitude expressed by both employers and employed for the engagements effected through the medium of the office.

I have, &c.,

E. R. BREMNER,

Officer in Charge.

The Secretary for Labour, Wellington.

NELSON.

SIR,—

Department of Labour (Women's Branch), Nelson, 15th April, 1910.

I have the honour to submit a report for that portion of the year from the 3rd January, when this office was opened, till the 31st March, 1910.

Twelve hundred circulars were posted during the month of January to employers, and locals were inserted in the daily papers notifying the public that this branch had been opened.

Great appreciation is expressed by mistresses and maids at the opening of this branch, and it is filling a long-felt want.

There is, as elsewhere in New Zealand, a great dearth of domestic workers in the city and country districts, and fifty or sixty good generals could easily be placed. Numbers of people in the city who can afford to keep domestic help, are going into smaller homes, or having their meals at hotels or restaurants on account of the impossibility of getting help; others are doing the best they can by employing charwomen by the day.