

ARBITRATION.

The Arbitration system has been greatly benefited during the year by the work of the Commissioners and Councils of Conciliation. The Court of Arbitration has been relieved from overpressure, the agreements brought about between employers and employed by conciliatory measures have produced a more pacific spirit in regard to disputes, and there has been a clear gain to the State in point of economy over the old system of Conciliation Boards.

The following table compares the expenditure on the Conciliation Boards during the years 1907–8 and 1908–9 with that of the Conciliation Councils of 1909–10. The expenses of the Arbitration Court are also given for the three years. (The salaries of members of the Court (£2,800) and of Conciliation Commissioners (£1,500) are not included in these totals during the years compared) :—

	1907–8.			1908–9.			1909–10.		
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
Boards	1,696	15	2	1,472	12	3	14	14	0
Councils	..	..	..	..	..	..	1,062	1	10
Arbitration Court ..	2,378	19	10	2,536	16	7	1,525	13	3
	£4,075	15	0	£4,009	8	10	£2,602	9	1

Awards had the effect of keeping the living-wage intact through the stress of last winter. The provision in the amending Act giving to Inspectors the issue of under-rate workers' permits has been highly satisfactory.

The expenses of administering the Act for the year, so far as the assessors of the Councils of Conciliation are concerned, are as follows :—

Industrial District.	Fees.			Travelling-expenses.			Total.		
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
Northern and Taranaki	347	11	0	46	6	2	393	17	2
Wellington, Marlborough, Nelson, and Westland ..	106	1	0	12	15	4	118	16	4
Canterbury and Otago and Southland	252	0	0	76	16	6	328	16	6
Totals	705	12	0	135	18	0	841	10	0

The travelling-expenses, &c., of the Commissioners of Conciliation amounted to £220 11s. 10d., whilst those of the Arbitration Court amounted to £1,525 13s. 3d.

The following summary of cases which have attracted attention may be worthy of note :—

The Auckland Shipmasters' Award.—This award deals, *inter alia*, with rates of pay for masters of vessels in the intercolonial and Home trades. A mooted question *re* the industrial position of the P. and O. Company's steamers makes important all information trenching on this subject. (Awards, &c., Vol. x, p. 128).

The Wellington Butter, Creamery, and Cheese Factories.—The memorandum attached to this award dealing with the hours and wages of employees refuses a request of factory-owners to lower wages, refusal being based on the ground that inflated land-values should not prejudice a fair living-wage being paid to workers. (Vol. x, p. 146).

The Gisborne Painters and Decorators.—The union's request for the minimum wages to be raised on the ground of increased cost of living was refused, it being considered by the Court that the cost of living had not practically increased since 1905. Also, that evidence to the effect that a higher wage is considered "reasonable" by the workers is not sufficient (without evidence of fact or argument in support) to effect an alteration in an award previously existent. (Vol. x, pp. 191, 192).

The New Zealand Federated Boot Trades.—It appears from the memorandum (p. 291) that the Court recognises as a principle that if conditions of business in a trade are improved through a rise in the tariff the workers are entitled to a share of the benefit. In the case being considered, however, there was no evidence as to the exact amount of benefit caused by increased Customs duties, and therefore no means for the Court (if it has such functions) to adjust the ratio of benefit between employers and employees. The increase granted was based principally on an offer made by employers. (Vol. x, p. 285.)