

The outstanding feature of this return appears to be the falling-off that has again taken place in the number of employees between the ages of fourteen and twenty years. Last year between these ages there was a total of 18,960 hands employed, whilst this year the total is 18,173, a decrease of 787.

I have explained in another paragraph the great dearth there has been in boy and girl labour, but this continued falling-off of hands must be viewed with grave concern. Mr. Tregear in his report last year pointed out that with a diminishing birth-rate and limited immigration there is very little hope of any improvement being effected. I can but indorse this statement. Orders for local work have been refused over and over again in the textile factories owing to there not being sufficient labour available to tend the machines, whilst the fruit trade and biscuit and confectionery trade, as well as others, cannot at certain seasons cope with the work. As to the conditions of work—the pay, hours, and surroundings—they must be described as very satisfactory. The factory legislation of New Zealand is looked upon as safeguarding the interests of the workers to a greater extent than in any other part of the world, and, quite apart from the strict requirements of the Factories Act, the employees, especially the boys and girls, receive special consideration in regard to wages. For years past there has been a tendency to pay 8s. to 15s. per week for a start to both boys and girls, and it is not a rare occurrence for one factory-owner to bid against his neighbour in the same town to attract such labour to his factory.

It would appear, therefore, that, at all events at present, the prosperity of our manufacturing industries is not so much dependent on the state of trade as upon the possibility of securing labour: the trade is assured, the labour is not. Undoubtedly the tendency of the boy and girl of to-day is to avoid the factory and seek work in offices.

The skilled trades are suffering likewise. There are comparatively few apprentices offering, and the whole position calls for immediate review. Hundreds of girls ranging in age from seventeen to twenty-five years are co-workers with youths and men in offices, and the tendency of parents is to give the daughters, equally with their sons, a training to enable them to take up office-work in preference to any other. This, in my opinion, is one of the chief causes of the dearth of labour in both domestic and factory work, and when the point is reached that wages in offices will be lower than those in factories, then, and only then, can a turn in the tide be expected.

The following return shows the number of factories in the four chief cities of the Dominion, classified according to the number of hands employed:—

Town.	Factories employing												Total Factories.
	30 Hands and under.	31 to 50.	51 to 100.	101 to 150.	151 to 200.	201 to 250.	251 to 300.	301 to 350.	351 to 400.	401 to 450.	451 to 500.	Over 500.	
Auckland ..	1,419	46	34	7	5	..	1	1	..	..	..	..	1,513
Wellington ..	1,053	24	12	3	2	2	1	1	..	..	..	..	1,098
Christchurch ..	1,296	23	20	7	2	2	1	..	2	..	2	..	1,355
Dunedin ..	1,136	23	18	9	2	1	2	..	..	..	..	2	1,193
	4,904	116	84	26	11	5	5	2	2	..	2	2	5,159

Overtime.

The total number of hours worked by women and by boys under sixteen years of age was 365,628, an increase of 87,066 hours over the returns of 1909–10. The dressmaking, tailoring, clothing, printing, biscuit, confectionery, and laundry trades, in point of extra hours worked, were the busiest. The details, according to trades, are given in this report.

Permits.

During the year permits were issued to 1,111 boys and 1,273 girls to work in factories. A return giving details according to towns and standard of education is given in this report.

Accidents in Factories.

The number of accidents recorded this year—viz., 872—shows a considerable increase over the number reported last year—that is, 735. Of this total, 638 of the accidents were slight; 145 might be classed as moderate—that is, incapacitating the worker for a short period; and 77 were serious—that is, affecting the worker's earning-capacity for life. Twelve accidents were fatal, as against 7 last