

REPORTS OF LOCAL INSPECTORS OF FACTORIES AND AGENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR.

AUCKLAND.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Auckland, 21st April, 1913.

I beg to submit the annual report of this branch of the Department, in connection with the administration of the various labour laws, for the year ending the 31st March, 1913.

The period under review has been one of steady and solid progress in every respect, both as regards Auckland City and generally throughout the whole province. The large increase of population has had the result of keeping trade of every description busy for the greater part of the year.

Building and allied trades have, as a consequence, kept a large number of men at constant employment, except during the latter part of the period, when, owing to a tightness of the money-market, the trade slackened off somewhat. The Auckland City Council and suburban local authorities issued 1,233 building licenses for the erection of buildings (valued at £573,100), a large number of which will be up-to-date factory and business premises.

The leather trades do not advance as they undoubtedly ought to do. The bootmaking industry should employ a very much larger number of men than at present. It is stated by manufacturers that this is due to imported boots, which seem to be preferred by the public to the local production, although in some instances the former are of inferior quality. These remarks also apply to the saddlery trade, which is greatly affected by imported goods.

The furniture trade experienced a prosperous year, and during part of the period competent tradesmen were in demand, especially in the country districts.

The engineering trades have kept going fairly well; at times men have been in demand, but for the most part of the time matters have been about normal.

In the clothing trades there continues the want of female labour, it being claimed by employers that several hundred more female workers could be continuously employed if they were available. Owing to the shortage of workers, clothing which would otherwise be manufactured in the Dominion has to be imported. This is an important matter, and should be given full consideration.

Unskilled-labour work has been plentiful, owing to the very large drainage-works in hand in or about Auckland City. Throughout the country districts also a good deal of work has been carried out, although the strikes at Waihi and Huntly caused some considerable disorganization of unskilled labour, by throwing a large number of men on the labour-market. There has not at any time throughout the year, however, been any congestion of labour. The weather has also been a factor in permitting good time to be made by outdoor workmen.

A very good year has been experienced by the retail traders. In many old-established businesses a record trade has been done, while the number of shops has greatly increased in nearly every kind of business.

The kauri-gum industry is at present in a prosperous condition, consequent upon the high price ruling for that product. It is stated that there are at present over a thousand men employed and earning good wages, and that the prospects indicate that this will continue for some time. Owing to the dry weather experienced the season for this work has been an excellent one.

FACTORIES ACT.

The administration of this Act has been carried out with a minimum of friction, although it occasions a considerable amount of work. Visits of inspection have been made to all factories where hands are employed, and special attention has been given to ventilation and sanitation. With regard to the latter a number of factories are not as satisfactory as they should be, owing to want of drainage facilities, but when the drainage-works now in progress are completed the question will receive attention with a view to improvement. It is also worthy of note that a number of up-to-date factory premises have been erected, and the accommodation provided shows a distinct improvement upon the class of building which was considered satisfactory some years ago.

Registration.—The number of factories registered this year is 1,658, employing a total of 12,235 persons; in addition to these, there are 1,869 occupiers actually employed at factory work, thus bringing the number of persons engaged up to 15,104. The details are: Male employees, 9,470; female employees, 3,765. These totals show an increase of 50 factories and 1,710 employees on last year's returns.

Permits to Young Persons.—Certificates of fitness to work in factories were issued to 504 young persons under sixteen years of age—242 to boys and 262 to girls. This is a decrease of 60 as compared with last year. The 1910 amendment, providing that boys or girls over thirteen years of age and under fourteen who have obtained a certificate of exemption under section 150 of the Education Act, 1908, may be employed, is not generally known, and has therefore not been taken advantage of to any extent.