

NEW PLYMOUTH.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, New Plymouth, 23rd April, 1913.

I beg to submit my annual report of the work of this branch of the Department for the year ending 31st March, 1913.

GENERAL.

Satisfactory conditions of employment and of trade generally have been maintained.

Building and drainage permits in the Borough of New Plymouth have been issued to the values of £28,320 and £2,520 respectively. The amount spent on public works in the borough from loan is £2,097 4s., and on sewer-extension work £2,121 10s. 10d. Wages paid on maintenance work amount to £4,321. Loans to the value of £42,000 for street and water works, and of £55,000 for electric tramways have been sanctioned by poll of ratepayers, and there is every indication that the present year will be a busy one from a labour point of view. In the various building trades work has been constant and steady, and there has been practically no unemployment; in fact, owing to the erection of a large refinery at the oil-wells, a number of boilermakers and bricklayers has been imported from the other centres.

Butter and cheese factories have had an exceptionally busy year, and a number that formerly dealt with butter only have installed new machinery in the manufacture of cheese. The question of the extraction of casein is also being dealt with in several instances.

The meat industry has had a very satisfactory season, and, although a strike of slaughtermen occurred, the local works suffered very little inconvenience.

Furniture-manufacturing has been busy throughout the year, and there has been a demand for competent cabinetmakers and upholsterers, whilst sash and door and boxmaking factories have been kept busy, and the prospects are bright.

Engineering trades, including cycle and motor work, have kept well up to the average, especially in respect to repair work.

In the various branches of the clothing and in the millinery trades business has been good, and a considerable amount of overtime has been worked by the operatives.

Retail shops have every reason to be satisfied with the turnover, money having been plentiful, owing to a great extent to the good season experienced.

Employment at the local wharf has been fairly constant. Good progress is being made in the petroleum-oil industry. There are three companies operating here at present, and a large refinery for dealing with crude oil is being erected. This industry has provided employment for a large number of skilled and unskilled workers.

MEN'S EMPLOYMENT BUREAU.

Very little difficulty has been experienced in dealing with the applications for employment made at this office. The total number of men assisted to work was 48, 36 of whom were sent to private employment and 12 to the Government railway-extension works. A number of applications has recently been made by dairy-farmers for youths for milking at wages averaging from 15s. to £1 5s. per week and found, but the supply of this class of labour in the district is below the demand.

FACORIES ACT.

During the year 242 factories have been registered, as against 230 for the previous year. The number of persons employed was 927 males and 118 females.

There have been 1,078½ hours overtime worked by 67 women and boys.

Nineteen certificates of fitness to work in factories have been issued to 8 boys and 11 girls under sixteen years of age.

The number of accidents reported is 6, but none of them was of a serious nature.

All the factories in the district have been visited, special attention having been given to sanitation and ventilation, and in every case where improvements have been required the request has been readily complied with.

There have been 3 prosecutions under the Act, and a conviction recorded in each case, fines, &c., to the amount of £6 2s. 8d. being inflicted. Arrears of wages to the amount of £6 17s. 5d. have been recovered from employers and paid to the employees concerned.

I have also visited Waitara, Eltham, Urenui, Inglewood, Stratford, Hawera, Patea, Manaia, Whangamomona, and Okato, and have found the provisions of the Act complied with in a satisfactory manner.

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

During the year 277 shops, including 16 hotels, employing 423 males and 131 females, were registered.

Permits were issued to work a total of 583 hours overtime.

The Act is well observed, and only one case has been taken to Court—viz., that of a Chinese shopkeeper, for failing to comply with a gazetted requisition by which the majority of shopkeepers had fixed the closing-hour. A fine of 5s. was inflicted, with £1 1s. 8d. costs.

At the time of writing the towns in the Taranaki district are being canvassed with the idea of obtaining Saturday afternoon as the statutory half-holiday; shopkeepers generally, however, seem to be against the idea.

A thorough inspection of the seating-accommodation for female shop-assistants has been made, and been found to be satisfactory, and much appreciated by the assistants. Special attention has been given to the foodstuff shops, and a number of requests has been made in the matter of cleanliness; in each case the request has been complied with.