

instead of a separate census being taken by the Native Department as on former occasions, and as is still considered necessary in the North Island, where the Natives are much more numerous.

The usual five-yearly collection of manufacturing statistics and statistics of fisheries was also carried out during the year, and the returns are now in process of tabulation. The question of the annual collection of these statistics is one which should be taken up immediately conditions return to normal.

AGRICULTURAL AND PASTORAL STATISTICS.

The first collection of agricultural and pastoral statistics under the new system referred to at length in my report of last year was successfully undertaken for the season 1915-16, and the main collection for this season is now nearing completion. The monthly returns of threshings of wheat and oats are invaluable, as giving the earliest possible information and furnishing a reliable basis from month to month on which to estimate in advance the approximate total yield. A census of stocks of wheat, flour, and oats was taken for the 30th November.

In connection with the tabulation of the sheep returns, which was taken over by this office from the Agricultural Department last year, an objection to the old form was that after completion of the statistical work the returns had to be sent back to the District Offices of the Agricultural Department for utilization in connection with the registration of brands. An improved form of return has now been adopted, giving in separate detachable portions the full information required for both purposes, and allowing of the portion dealing with brands being detached by the district officers and the statistical portion being sent to Wellington and retained here for future reference if required.

The new form is in a handier shape and size for sorting purposes, and makes for greater speed in tabulation work. This year the first parcel of returns came to hand on the 24th May, and the proof of the first interim return for presentation to Parliament was received from the Printer and sent to the Secretary of Agriculture to-day (21st June). The principal advantage of the new system is, however, that it permits of the registration work being proceeded with immediately the returns are received from the farmers, instead of a delay of several weeks being necessary as under the old system.

INDUSTRIAL AND ECONOMIC INQUIRIES.

Little fresh ground has been broken in this branch, mainly on account of the lack of a properly qualified officer to conduct the branch, combined with the abnormal amount of necessary and urgent work in other directions requiring the attention of myself and my senior officers. Comprehensive regulations have been gazetted authorizing the collection of the data required for the computation of cost-of-living index numbers and the keeping of a continuous record of prices, and a start has been made with certain branches of wholesale prices. The collection of data in regard to rent has been placed on a better footing, which is calculated to allow of the rent movement being more accurately measured.

GENERAL STATISTICAL WORK.

The general statistical work has been kept going, and improvements and additions have been instituted where found advisable. The statistical publications have not been issued as early this year as in former years, owing to the necessity of employing every available member of the staff on the military service work in its incipient stages while temporary clerks were being trained. In order to conserve stocks of paper the 1916 issue of the Year-book has been considerably reduced in size, though not in comprehensiveness. The smaller size of the book and the summarizing of considerable detail matter appearing in former issues should also add to its value as a book of handy reference.

The Monthly Abstract continues to attract an increasing circulation, and it is evident that this little publication is filling a long-felt want in important sections of the community. From now on the Abstract will contain the cost-of-living tables and monthly statements of prices compiled in this office, and formerly published in the *Journal of the Department of Labour*, which has ceased publication.

During the year metropolitan areas were created at the four chief centres, and suburban areas at nine of the more important secondary centres, for purposes of population and vital statistics. Maps of the respective areas have recently been gazetted for general information.

An objection to the old system of publishing statistics for the municipal areas only was that these were constantly being extended or otherwise altered, and no proper comparison could be made between one period and another, and no satisfactory record kept of the social condition and progress of the community. The creation of fairly extensive areas fixed for a long period will remove these disabilities.

NEW WORK.

For some years past this office has compiled statistics relating to diseases, ages, &c., of patients treated in public hospitals, and the office has now taken over from the Health and Hospitals Department the compilation (for the annual report of the Department) of the financial statistics relating to Hospital Boards and the institutions under their control. A commencement is being made with the returns supplied by Boards for the financial year 1916-17, for which year a uniform system of commercial accounting has been introduced for the first time.

In consequence of existing war conditions a number of new inquiries and reports have been called for during the year, and the periodical collection of returns of stocks of coal, tin-plates, iron and steel bars, &c., has had to be undertaken.

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