

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR.

UNEMPLOYMENT.

During the past year much difficulty has been experienced by manufacturers and others in obtaining sufficient suitable labour.

INDUSTRIAL CONDITIONS.

There were a number of industrial disputes during the year, causing cessations of employment. Many of them were of a trivial nature. The more serious related to strikes of coal-miners. The legislation which was passed last session empowering the Arbitration Court to increase the wages prescribed by awards, where the cost of living had risen since those awards were made, largely removed the cause of the disturbances. In four instances it was found necessary to institute proceedings for breaches of the law.

INDUSTRIAL UNREST.

There is no subject which demands more earnest consideration from thinking men and women at the present time than the problem of industrial unrest. The suspicion between employer and employed, with all its consequent evils of direct action and restricted output, must be removed if our country is to secure the best results from industry and become the home of a prosperous, happy, and law-abiding people.

As the result of a Labour Conference held in July, 1918, a report was issued to the trade-union movement of New Zealand, the study of which I commend to my fellow-members and the public generally. The report recognizes the necessity for some constructive action to meet the present unsatisfactory conditions, and states that "The hope of the immediate future undoubtedly lies in the intimate and continuous association of both management and labour for the purpose of adjusting differences and for the purpose of promoting the progressive improvement of their industrial service from which alone the national prosperity can be derived," and proposes an organization for the guidance of industry, consisting of a National Industrial Council composed of representatives of employers and employed, with Joint District Councils and Works Committees. The proposals are based on the recommendations contained in reports to the British Prime Minister of a sub-committee of the Reconstruction Committee, generally spoken of as the "Whitley reports." The British Government adopted the recommendations in the Whitley reports, both for Government industrial establishments and for outside industries as well, and for these latter a considerable number of Joint Standing Industrial Councils, Interim Industrial Reconstruction Committees, and Trade Boards have been brought into existence. As illustrating the purposes for which these organizations have been formed, I refer to the report of the National Joint Industrial Council for the British Coir-mat and Matting Industry, which states the objects:—

"The Council is a Trade Parliament, composed of employers' and workers' representatives in equal numbers. Its primary object is to secure, by association in its government of all engaged in the industry, the advancement in the industry and of all connected therewith. It will endeavour by the fullest and freest discussion to establish such conditions as shall be equitable as between employer and employed."

"Meetings of the Council will be held at least once a quarter, and the following questions, amongst others, will be considered:—

- "(a.) Wages, hours, and working-conditions in the industry as a whole.
- "(b.) Measures for regularizing production and employment, for reducing the effects of seasonal fluctuations, and for ensuring to the workpeople the greatest possible security of earnings.
- "(c.) Methods for the settlement of differences between different parties in the industry.
- "(d.) The improvement of the health conditions obtaining in the industry."