

1922.
NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIES AND COMMERCE

(BOARD OF TRADE)

(FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

THE subjoined report deals with the operations of the Department of Industries and Commerce since the last report was placed before Parliament, and covers a period of a little over one year—viz., 1st July, 1921, to 31st July, 1922.

The period under review has been a particularly busy one, and the work of the Department, owing to retrenchment of staff, has been carried out under difficulties. Some of the functions have had to be curtailed or set aside because of the inability of the reduced staff to cope with the work. Compared with last year, a reduction of over 50 per cent. has been made in the personnel.

Mr. George Wilson, a member of the Board of Trade, voluntarily retired at the 31st December last, and Mr. P. Hally, another member of the Board, has recently been transferred to the position of Conciliation Commissioner at Auckland.

BOARD OF TRADE ACT, 1919.

The Cost of Living Act, 1915, which was essentially a temporary and repressive measure, was designed chiefly with the object of providing means of price-control arising out of war conditions. The provisions of this Act were modified and extended by a permanent measure, the Board of Trade Act, passed in 1919. The publicity given to the various profiteering cases instituted under section 32 created a widespread but erroneous impression that the Board of Trade Act was itself only a post-war measure designed for the suppression of profiteering. The Act, however, provides for a permanent and constructive policy, the effective pursuance of which necessitates continuity in the matter of investigation and research. The main functions of the Board and the Department are summarized in section 12, which provides that investigations and inquiries shall be made relative to the industries of the Dominion, that the results of such investigations may be published for general information, and that regulations may be made for the maintenance, control, or development of local industries. It is generally understood that industry relates to production and commerce to distribution, but it is difficult to draw a distinct line of demarcation as to where distribution begins and production ends. The Department has given section 12 a wide interpretation, and, while making every endeavour to safeguard the interests of consumers, has sought to foster production and distribution along efficient lines, and to do all possible to assist the manufacturing and trading sections of the community.

The Act imposes upon the Department the duty of publishing, so far as may be deemed expedient in the public interest, information with respect to industries subjected to investigation. This function is more fully explained in section 24 of the Act, under the provisions of which publication of reports of investigations is made. This power of publication provides the means by which unfair business practices may be restricted by the force of an enlightened public opinion. On the other hand, publicity for constructive purposes in the development of industry and trade constitutes one of the most important functions of the Department.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT OF NEW ZEALAND.

As has already been indicated, one of the main functions of the Department is to foster and assist the secondary industries of the Dominion, particular attention being given to those most nearly related to primary production and to those industries utilizing the raw materials available in New Zealand. Since its establishment the Department has co-operated with the industrial associations of the Dominion, and has assisted them in solving many problems presenting economic difficulties. The industrialists of the Dominion have displayed a commendable spirit of self-help in this connection, and, realizing that the staff of the Department has necessarily had to suffer by retrenchment, have been most reasonable in their requests for departmental assistance. The associations have realized that if they are to obtain the good will and support of the public it is necessary for them to educate the public as to exactly what is being made in New Zealand, and to ensure that the quality of the goods manufactured and the prices charged are such as to warrant this support.