

REGISTRATION OF INDUSTRIAL ASSOCIATIONS AND UNIONS.

The usual statutory return (to the 31st December, 1931) of the associations and unions registered under the Act, with their membership at that date, is published herewith as an appendix. Comparison with the previous year shows that the total number of workers' unions has decreased by eleven (to 405) and the total membership has decreased by 10,990 (from 101,516 to 90,526).

INSPECTIONS, ETC.

During the year 3,203 complaints of alleged breaches of the Act and of awards and industrial agreements, &c., were received, but it was found on investigation that in 813 cases no breach had been committed; in 185 cases proceedings were taken, and in 1,892 warnings were given. No action was considered necessary in the remaining cases. Apart from the complaints mentioned above, a large proportion of the inspections of factories, shops, &c., included an inspection to ascertain whether the awards and agreements were being complied with in respect of wages, overtime, &c., and, as a result of these inspections, 34 prosecutions were taken and warnings were given in other cases. Of the 219 prosecutions, 206 were against employers and 13 against workers; 166 convictions were recorded, 156 against employers and 10 against workers. Total penalties, £253 7s.

AMENDMENTS TO ACT.

During the year legislation was passed (*vide* Part II of the Finance Act, 1931) giving the Court of Arbitration power by general order to amend the provisions of awards, agreements, and apprenticeship orders in so far as such provisions determined the rates of remuneration of workers, with the proviso that any such general order would not apply to any contract of apprenticeship in force at the taking-effect of such general order. In exercising the powers mentioned the Court of Arbitration was required to have regard to the economic and financial conditions affecting trade and industry in New Zealand. In pursuance of this legislation the Court on the 29th May, 1931, issued a general order reducing the rates of remuneration fixed by awards, agreements, and apprenticeship orders by 10 per cent.

Although this reduction was of considerable assistance to employers, it was urged on their behalf that industry was being unduly hampered by various restrictive conditions imposed by awards and agreements in connection with the employment of labour. With a view to assisting industry in this respect during the present economic crisis, a Bill was introduced to amend the conciliation and arbitration procedure under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act and to provide for the immediate review by the employers and workers of all awards and agreements in respect of wages and other conditions of employment. It was felt by the Government that the prevailing conditions in trade and industry were such that the full co-operation of employers and workers was essential if the economic distress arising out of the depression was to be alleviated in any way, and it was considered that the adjustment of wages and other conditions of employment with that object in view could be more satisfactorily arranged in the circumstances by agreement between the parties than by arbitrary fixation. For this reason the Bill provided for what might be termed "compulsory conciliation and optional arbitration," a radical departure from the old principles of conciliation and arbitration which had been in operation for over thirty years and under which, if conciliation failed, arbitration was compulsory.

The Bill was passed by Parliament shortly after the close of the year, but in view of the importance of the measure a summary of its main provisions is being given in this report.

INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION AMENDMENT ACT, 1932.

Section 3: The maximum number of assessors on each side in conciliation proceedings is increased by one—from three to four in local disputes and from six to seven in "Dominion" disputes—*i.e.*, disputes affecting more than one industrial district.

Section 5: If a settlement of a dispute is arrived at by the Conciliation Council the terms of the settlement shall be reduced to writing, and signed by all the assessors. The document is then filed and operates as an industrial agreement in the same way as if it were an industrial agreement signed by all the parties to the dispute.

Section 6: This gives any party to the dispute power to apply to the Court for exemption from the operation of an agreement filed under the preceding section.

Section 7: This section provides that a dispute can be referred to the Court only in cases where the specified majority of assessors representative of both parties agree that it shall be so referred. It also provides that if within thirty days after the first meeting of the Conciliation Council the dispute is not settled or referred to the Court of Arbitration or adjourned for further consideration by the parties for a period of not more than fourteen days or in the last-mentioned case is not settled or referred to the Court within five days after the resumption of proceedings the Conciliation Commissioner shall notify the Clerk of Awards accordingly, and at the expiration of one month from the date of the Commissioner's notification any award or industrial agreement in force in that industry binding on the parties shall be deemed to be cancelled, and shall thereupon cease to be in force. If, however, the dispute relates to an industry in which female workers are employed, and it is not settled in the Conciliation Council or referred to the Court for settlement, any organization representing the female workers concerned may have the minimum rates of wages that may be paid to such female workers fixed by the Court of Arbitration.