

The following table shows the number of apprentices employed in each year since 1928:—

April,				Number of Apprentices.	April,				Number of Apprentices.
1928	..	..	..	10,227	1933	..	..	..	5,594
1929	..	..	..	9,943	1934	..	..	..	4,303
1930	..	..	..	9,826	1935	..	..	..	3,329
1931	..	..	..	8,901	1936	..	..	..	3,552
1932	..	..	..	6,910					

Last year's report referred to the serious decline in the number of apprentices employed in skilled trades due partly to the extreme reluctance on the part of employers to take on apprentices under the existing provisions.

The year under review shows an improvement in the position, there being 1,292 new contracts registered. This would seem to indicate that with the increase of confidence in business employers are again prepared to engage apprentices.

The sharp decline in the number of apprentices employed during the depression period and the consequent likelihood of a shortage of skilled tradesmen in the near future gives rise to a serious consideration of the desirability of encouraging employers to give suitable training to persons who by force of circumstances were prevented from serving a period of apprenticeship.

ARREARS OF WAGES.

Amounts totalling £11,790 10s. 2d. were collected by the Department's officers on behalf of workers who had been underpaid the wages prescribed by awards and the various Acts, while further amounts of such arrears, totalling £6,349 16s. 6d., were paid by employers, at the instance of the Inspectors, directly to the workers concerned: total, £18,140 6s. 8d. Increased inspection work during the year under review has resulted in a large increase in the above figures, the amount collected by the Department's officers being approximately twice as much as that collected in 1934–35.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION ACT.

During the year 110 cases were heard and determined by the Court of Arbitration (previous year, 111).

The more important decisions, with a digest thereof, are published in "New Zealand Workers' Compensation Cases", which is issued annually by the Department.

SHEARERS' ACCOMMODATION ACT.

Complaints were made last winter regarding the accommodation at a number of sheds. As a result a special inspection was made of those sheds to which the complainants drew attention, and alteration or improvements to the accommodation arranged for where necessary. It was decided towards the end of the year to fill the vacant position of Dominion Inspector of Accommodation at Sawmills, Flaxmills, and Shearing-sheds, and this officer recently commenced duty. A report of his activities will therefore be made next year.

SCAFFOLDING AND EXCAVATION ACT.

During the year 5,025 notices of intention to erect buildings and scaffoldings and to commence excavations were received (previous year, 3,413) and 12,971 inspections were made.

There were 14 prosecutions, convictions being recorded in 12 cases, and fines amounting to £7 10s. being imposed.

The number of accidents to workers during the year ending 31st December, 1935, was 229 (of which 1 was fatal). It should be mentioned that the total includes not only accidents to workers on scaffolding or in connection with gear or excavations, but also all other accidents occurring in connection with building operations. Taking into consideration the hazardous nature of the work and the number of workers involved, the number of accidents due to falls from scaffolds, ladders, or roofs is small—viz., 34. The numbers according to occupations were—labourers, 97; carpenters, 75; unclassified, 57.

Information as to the time lost and compensation paid shows in regard to the cases in which details are available that a total of 6,391 days were lost and compensation to the amount of £3,968 was paid.

The following are particulars of the fatal accident reported:—

An employee of a brewery, engaged in whitewashing the ceiling of a cellar, was standing on a 12 ft. by 2 ft. plank placed on top of two trestles about 10 ft. from the ground. In stepping down he caught his foot on the leg of the trestle and fell to the ground suffering severe head injuries which later proved fatal.

In the following case the accident was to a person other than a "worker" within the meaning of that term as defined by the Workers' Compensation Act, 1922.

A member of a firm of painters who had been working alone on a ladder at a height of 14 ft. from the ground fell and suffered fatal head injuries. It was thought that he may have come in contact with live electric wires, the resultant shock causing his fall.