

INDUSTRIAL DISTURBANCES DURING THE YEAR.

There were forty-two industrial disturbances during the year, as compared with twenty last year. The increase can be attributed mainly to disputes centering round the reduction of working-hours to forty and the restoration of 1931 wage rates.

In most cases the disturbances were of a minor nature and settlements were amicably effected. The most serious case occurred just prior to the Christmas holidays when 1,500 workers at the Westfield and Southdown Freezing-works adopted "go-slow" methods, the trouble arising out of dissatisfaction with the rates of wages and other conditions in the new Freezing-workers' award. At the request of the Hon. the Minister of Labour normal work was resumed pending a meeting of the parties after the holidays to consider the matters in dispute. A conference of the parties was held in Wellington on the 8th January, but was not successful. The workers then adopted a "stay-in" policy, and work was suspended at the works. Following intervention by the Hon. the Minister of Labour it was agreed to resume work on the understanding that a conference of the parties was called in Wellington. The conference was held on Thursday and Friday, 21st and 22nd January. Representatives of the workers from each part of the Dominion and of employers from all the works were present, the Hon. the Minister of Agriculture also being associated with the conference. There was evidence that the conference would break up without any good result. There was no doubt that the lower-paid workers had good grounds for dissatisfaction. The Arbitration Court has laid down in the past that labourers in freezing-works are entitled to 3d. per hour in excess of the rates paid to labourers outside freezing-works. The rate for labourers in the new award was 2s. 1d. per hour. The workers thus felt that they had lost their place in the scale-rate of wages for labourers. The employers were not prepared to concede any increase unless they received a direction from the Hon. the Minister of Labour in the matter. He, therefore, directed that a bonus of 3d. per hour should be paid to all hourly workers for time worked, excluding overtime, the workers to hold over the other demands made by them—viz., a forty-hour week and a 10-per-cent. increase in piece-rates—until a new award was made. This was agreed to by both parties.

LABOUR DISPUTES INVESTIGATION ACT, 1913.

During the year eight agreements were filed pursuant to section 8 (1), the agreement in each case being reached without recourse to a conference under the Act or to a Labour Disputes Committee. These agreements were as follows:—

- Clerical employees (sugar company), Auckland.
- Engineers (shift) in freezing-works, Auckland.
- Engineers (shift) in freezing-works, Wellington Industrial District.
- Photo-engravers, Christchurch.
- Tow-boat employees, Auckland.
- Tramway and omnibus employees, Auckland.
- Tramway, omnibus, and power-house employees, Christchurch.
- Taxi-cab drivers, Dunedin.

Arising out of the disputes filed under the Act since its inception only nine ballots have been necessary, and in no case did a strike take place in pursuance of such a ballot.

Ten agreements were in force on 31st March, 1937, in the following industries:—

- Electric-power Board employees.
- Glassworkers.
- Shift engineers in freezing-works.
- Taxi-cab drivers.
- Tow-boat employees.
- Tramway and omnibus employees (including workshops and power-house employees).

APPRENTICES ACT.

This Act, which was passed in 1923, places the regulation of apprenticeships in the control of the Court of Arbitration. It also provides for the establishment of Committees representative of employers and workers; these have such powers as may be delegated to them by the Court.

The Committees, of which there are ninety-three functioning, are chiefly to be found in the main towns, and there is usually one for each industry.

The Department has again made available to Committees the services of some of its experienced officers, who undertake inquiry work and in many cases act in a secretarial capacity. These officers made seventy special inspections under this Act during 1936-37. In addition, inspections were carried out in the course of ordinary inspection and investigation work and while visiting factories, &c., in connection with other duties.

Complaints were received regarding 223 alleged breaches of the Act, while 136 other breaches were discovered by the Department's Inspectors, 231 warnings being issued.

There were thirty prosecutions during the year for various breaches of the Act and the orders made thereunder, convictions being entered in twenty-eight of the cases, and penalties amounting to £30 6s. being imposed. With one exception all the prosecutions were against employers.

The following table gives the approximate number of apprentices in the trades to which the Act applies. This information is based mainly on contracts of apprenticeship as registered with the Department.