

officers, have been carried out everywhere with, I believe, as much success as is possible for those in charge of new laws to meet. Legal expenses have been heavy, but are getting lighter as the labour laws are better understood and complied with. The *Journal of the Department of Labour* has been issued regularly, and has a distinct sphere of usefulness in regard to the circulation of information and of thoughtful literary work touching on labour questions.

The whole staff of the department has contributed its best energies to extend operations so far as was consistent with the severe economy necessary in expenditure of a small parliamentary vote.

REPORTS OF LOCAL INSPECTORS OF FACTORIES, AND AGENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR.

Sir,—

Department of Labour, Wellington, 22nd May, 1896.

I have the honour to submit my annual report, as follows:—

During the year 1,896 persons have registered their names at this office for employment. Of this number, 422 were sent to private employment, and 430 to Government works. The total number of persons assisted for the whole colony was 2,871, with 8,424 dependents. Work in the country seems during the last year to have been more scarce than formerly. Day after day men come into the office saying that squatters and large farmers are only doing what they are actually compelled to keep their places in order. There are many men who register their names as applicants for work and never return. These, I presume, get work outside, and have no need to again trouble the department. Wellington seems to be the centre of attraction for men from all parts of the colony. In visiting co-operative works in various parts of the country, I am continually being asked to give passages to Wellington, the men seeming to think if they were only here that work could be had in abundance. No doubt this is owing to Wellington's geographical position, and owing to the rapid progress Wellington has made as a commercial centre, also from the fact that the North Island for some years has been much more active as regards employment than in the South. I have had many interviews with men who have settled on land, and are now working on the alternative and other systems. With few exceptions they have expressed themselves very well satisfied. Many of them have a hard struggle to make ends meet, owing, in many cases, to the high prices they have to pay for provisions, consequent on the distance from a township and bad roads. I have on other occasions recommended that in summer time, when the roads are good, the Government should lay in a stock of provisions and supply the men. By this means the men would be able to get their goods at, in many cases, 50 per cent. less than they have to pay during the winter months. A Government store has been in existence on the Alfredton-Weber Road ever since Captain Turner and I went out with the men last April, and, I understand, it has paid its way splendidly, and the men have benefited by getting their goods at a much cheaper rate than they otherwise would have done. I know that the idea of the Government doing this sort of thing does not meet with much favour, but I think if it can be done without any loss to the Government, and be the means of the workers saving any money, it certainly should be carried out in all places where there are any difficulties in the way of transport, &c. According to general instructions from the Hon. the Minister, I have visited various co-operative works, and find the men fairly well satisfied. There has, of course, been grievances, but, on their being explained to the department having charge of the work, they have invariably been remedied.

As will be seen from the various reports from inspectors appointed to visit sheep-stations *re* accommodation for shearers that, in many cases, the premises provided were totally unfit for the purpose. With one or two exceptions, the owners at once agreed to make alterations, and in some instances have erected new buildings. There were two prosecutions under the Act, one being decided in our favour the other in a compromise.

FACTORIES ACT.

The provisions of this Act continue to be well observed in this city, and during my visits to other parts of the colony I found the same. The Act, in my opinion, has been of great benefit to the workers of the colony, especially to women and young persons, and has been the means of preventing many evils which, in older countries, have been of great harm to workers in factories and workrooms. Employers also have come to see that the Act is really not an oppressive one, and many of them have told me that they get better and more work out of their employes, owing to the conditions under which they work being so much improved, such as giving them better light and ventilation, perfect sanitary arrangements, &c. There have been thirteen prosecutions under this Act during the year, none of them being in Wellington. Miss Scott, the lady Inspector, has done good work during her connection with the department. Having been a worker herself, she is conversant with the needs of women working in factories. Many improvements have been made at her suggestion in factories throughout the colony. The total number of accidents is eighty-one, two of which were fatal. Twelve occurred in Wellington, none of them being of a very serious character.

SHOPS ACT.

This Act is now working very well both in Wellington and other parts of the colony. The greatest cause of complaint is in regard to the exemptions. Fancy-goods dealers complain that chemists invade their trade, and that, in fact, some of their shops are more of a fancy-goods