

REPORT.

The SECRETARY, Department of Labour, to the Right Hon. the MINISTER OF LABOUR.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wellington, 24th June, 1914.

I have the honour to present herewith the twenty-third annual report of this Department, for the information of His Excellency the Governor and to be laid before Parliament in compliance with the Labour Department and Labour Day Act, 1908, and the Factories Act, 1908. The report covers the late financial year—viz., from 1st April, 1913, to the 31st March, 1914.

I have, &c.,

F. W. ROWLEY,

The Right Hon. the Minister of Labour.

Secretary of Labour.

CONDITIONS OF TRADE AND EMPLOYMENT.

The year just closed has been an abnormal one from an industrial standpoint. Two main factors upset the equilibrium of trade and employment—the unsettled weather during spring and summer, and the strike of large bodies of men, mostly transport workers and miners, during the months from October, 1913, to January, 1914. The strike held up the shipping in the main ports for a time, and to a considerable extent adversely affected workers in practically all trades and callings in the larger towns, whilst the unseasonably wet weather experienced greatly retarded agricultural and pastoral work. (The strike is more extensively referred to later in this report, page 11.)

The autumn and winter of 1913 proved to be normal in regard to employment for the workers. Beyond the usual difficulty with unskilled casual labour and a slackness in the leather and engineering trades, the winter passed off fairly well. The leather trades (especially tanning and boot-manufacturing) have been slack; the latter trade has had an unusually bad year, and some of the representative men in the trade allege that it was one of the worst periods experienced for many years past. Towards the latter end of the year, however, it is pleasing to say that employment in the boot trade was more plentiful, and the outlook for 1914 is certainly brighter.

Artisans, in the building trade especially, lost very little time other than was due to weather-conditions and the strike, and, generally speaking, it may be said that this trade experienced a fair year of employment.

Employment in the clothing trades was only fair. These trades have generally given steady employment to their hands for some years past, and in the factories it has been a general complaint that sufficient workers, especially girls, could not be secured. Manufacturers and others have this year asserted that, as a direct result of the strike, in October, 1913–January, 1914, trade fell off considerably; short time was worked in most establishments during the period mentioned, and the Christmas season trade was not as buoyant as usual.

Despite the draybacks indicated, a splendid recovery was made in most industries during the late summer and autumn.

The primary industries—agriculture, dairying, and meat-freezing—have experienced an exceptionally busy season. There was the usual insistent demand for farm workers from October up to the end of March. Owing to an increased number of suitable hands arriving from overseas the Department was enabled to deal fairly promptly with applications from employers, and a large number of engagements satisfactory to both parties was made. In view of the great importance of farming to the trade of the Dominion it is a somewhat unsatisfactory feature of the demand for farm labour that the employment is not of a more regular nature. Very great advantage would result to all parties if more continuous employment could be ensured. This question is touched upon on page 5, and also in the separate report under the Workers' Dwellings Act, which will be attached to this report as Appendix B.

CASUAL LABOUR PROBLEM.

Following the settlement of the strike on the waterfront, a good deal of public attention has been centred upon the problem of how to deal best with the large surplusage of labour continually offering at the wharves. It is hoped that as a result of a conference of delegates of the various Harbour Boards in January last, convened and presided over by yourself, some means may be found by which the employment of watersiders—at all events those employed by