

Uniform Factory At New Plymouth Begins Production

"There isn't much to see yet; we won't be in full swing for another month," Mr. J. McKendrick told a Daily News reporter who visited a new factory to see air force uniforms being made at New Plymouth for the first time, but with 17 operatives hard at work and uniforms growing under their hands the reporter saw a good deal.

Mr. McKendrick, who is an army and air force contractor, moved his factory from Wellington to New Plymouth because he found the difficulty of getting labour at Wellington almost insuperable. The factory opened only yesterday and, as was pointed out, it was still in the process of shaking down, but everything was moving smoothly as the uniforms passed from one machinist to the next till the garments took shape.

Cutting Out in Bulk.

Perhaps the first step in the process is the most interesting. Moving up and down at great speed, a razor-sharp knife slices through 52 thicknesses of the heavy uniform material like a knife through butter, and making as clean a cut. The pieces cut out look like slabs of felt rather than 52 identical pieces of tunics. Every part of a uniform is cut in the same way.

There is a machine in the factory for almost every purpose, it seems. In the buttonholing machine the cloth is held firmly while the top of plant runs neatly round the buttonholes; another machine sews on buttons securely and neatly in the twinkling of an eye; a third, the proprietor's own invention, stamps eyelet holes with precision; more or less ordinary machines whirr as deft young women sew up seams. Yet with all the aids of mass production there is still finishing work that has to be done, and for that a team of tailoresses has to be engaged. Each one of the staff does her own job and soon becomes as proficient in it as the machine she tends.

The present objective is an output of 200 completely finished uniforms a week, and that will be reached when the full staff of 25 women and five men is working in the next few weeks. At that rate an air force contract will keep the factory busy for months to come and, when it is finished, there will be a military order to fill.

As such factories go, that at New Plymouth is only small, but even so it is amazing how compact the lay-out is, with easy and simultaneous supervision of every process at the same time. The system and the scope for efficiency are exactly the same as in a much larger establishment.