

Overtime.

However valuable the constantly increasing demands from employers to work their hands overtime may be as an index of extending trade and a sign of industrial prosperity, the pressure has during the last year kept up such a continuous strain that it demands serious attention from all those interested in the health and welfare of the workers. The reports of Factory Inspectors to this effect are reinforced by resolutions forwarded from powerful unions of working-women, deprecating legislative permission for such limits of overtime as may now be worked under the present Act. The table herewith presented shows a considerable increase in the number of hours worked in the colony, but the number of persons working those hours considerably increased also. In Christchurch only were the hours phenomenal and beyond all average. I here present in a tabular form the result of the two years' overtime in the four principal centres:—

	Persons working.		Hours worked.	
	1900.	1901.	1900.	1901.
Auckland	811	1,407	14,302	25,354
Wellington	1,362	1,955	39,689	52,465
Christchurch	1,743	2,066	42,154	70,558
Dunedin	1,174	1,819	42,024	63,348
	5,090	7,247	138,169	211,725

It should be noticed that this overtime has been recorded only concerning the work of women, girls, and lads, and that only in factories. If to this were added the hours of overtime worked by men in factories and by men and girls in shops, the result would be startling. Since this overtime has been worked within the limits allowed by law, it is my opinion and that of the Factory Inspectors in the chief towns that the legal hours of permitted overtime are too long. It may be said that the workers themselves are the best judges of their own physical capacity, but this is a fallacy, for many of them are very young, and even when older are by no means always wise enough to understand that a few extra shillings may be very dearly earned at the expense of the exhaustion of their bodily powers. Nor does any one who is acquainted with the true relations existing between wage-earner and wage-payer believe that freedom of choice exists as to the worker returning to duty at night if a wish is expressed by the employer that the employé should do so. It may, perhaps, be possible for men, under the protection of powerful trade-unions, to exert freedom of choice as to working overtime; but this applies to few of those persons who are at present under the Factories Act—viz., the women and boys. It was hoped that the introduction of a section into the Act insisting on a minimum wage for overtime would have had some retarding influence upon the growing demands of employers, but the present minimum wage of 6d. per hour is not high enough in itself to withstand the pressure of great industrial activity, and the result is becoming oppressive. I suggest that, though the minimum wage remain 6d. per hour, all overtime should be paid for at the rate of time and a half for wage-earners, while pieceworkers should have 50 per cent. for night-work added to the day-log prices. At present, if one of the better paid women, say, at £1 10s. per week, has to remain on overtime, she may only get 6d. per hour, while her rate of pay for the hours of day-work is 8d. per hour. Therefore her pay for overtime should be at least 1s. per hour, especially when it is remembered that the recreation-time of the worker has been taken, that an extra meal has to be paid for, and that her reserve of strength for the ensuing day's work has been drawn upon. If industrial prosperity is so great that the workers' services are in excessive demand, those who earn the profit should have a share in the profit.

I strongly recommend that overtime should not be permitted at all in the case of girls and boys under sixteen. Their growing bodies have performed quite enough work—often monotonous and laborious work—when they have finished their eight hours of factory labour.

SANITARY CONDITIONS.

Difficulty is often experienced by Inspectors of Factories in their efforts for procuring better sanitary conditions by the want of power to directly compel persons owning land and buildings near factories to keep their premises clean. It is useless to insist on a factory having good ventilation if the surrounding air is poisoned by emanations from filthy environment. It is sometimes almost impossible to get municipal officers to do their duty in this respect, as they are unwilling to take stringent measures against influential burgesses. The result is that often the process of compulsion under the present Act is ineffective and slow. There should be some method whereby an Inspector might demand and obtain immediate removal of refuse or the repair of drains on premises adjacent to a factory, just as though such nuisances were on the factory property itself.

SHOPS AND OFFICES.

The Shops and Shop-assistants Act has worked extremely well during the year. There have been few prosecutions, and, as the owners of shops have now grasped the requirements of the Act, they, in most cases, comply faithfully both with its letter and spirit.

The working-hours mentioned in the Act are, however, too long. They exceed those recognised by the better class of shops, wherein usually the assistants only work on ordinary days from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.; with an hour off for meals. This allows eight hours for four days, eleven hours for