

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT.

I am sorry to again have to report that I do not consider that the provisions of this Act are satisfactory, especially those for the closing of shops—the half-holiday closing extending over the whole week, and other times of closing varying to almost any hour. Again, the Act in itself has been amended so many times that it has to an ordinary inquirer become bewildering; so that I consider that a consolidated Act, fixing a daily hour for closing *all* shops, and prescribing definite provisions for such closing, would be highly desirable for employers, employees, and the general public.

Warrants to work overtime for stock-taking purposes were issued to 121 persons, who worked 1,114 hours, during the year.

Eight charges were brought against five shopkeepers: four convictions were recorded, and the other cases were dismissed.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

There are twenty-four licensed registry offices in this district—an increase of three on last year.

I have been called upon to regulate matters with respect to certain complaints, which I was enabled to do without resorting to prosecution.

It is a question which I think requires serious consideration, whether a legalised system of charging fees to persons seeking employment for obtaining work is a right system. It probably often occurs that the work so provided is barely worth the fees paid, and the expense of arriving at and returning from the scene of work.

INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION ACT.

The working of this Act by an Inspector of Factories as an Inspector of Awards entails a material additional responsibility, and a large amount of extra work. At the present time I have cited before the Court of Arbitration twenty employers, charged with forty breaches of award. I trust this will have the desired effect of acting as a deterrent, and I am sanguine that, now that employers are aware that responsible officers, with power to acquire information, are enforcing conformity to awards, breaches in future will be greatly lessened, and the provisions of this Act will be adhered to, with as small a degree of friction as in the case of other Acts controlled by this Department.

I have, &c.,

H. FERGUSON,

Inspector of Factories.

E. Tregear, Esq., Chief Inspector of Factories.

WELLINGTON.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wellington, 7th May, 1904.

I beg to submit for your consideration my report for the year ending the 31st March, 1904, and am pleased to be able to state with confidence that the work of the various branches of the labour laws under my control is progressing steadily and satisfactorily.

Trade in all branches has been very good during the year. Factories have been kept busy, and few complaints have been heard.

The iron trade has not been brisk during the year, and there have been many fitters out of work. This state of things has been brought about chiefly through the falling-off in the demand for dredging machinery, which three years ago caused such an abnormal increase in the number of men in the iron trade.

The building trade has been very brisk during the year, and there are still several large buildings in course of erection, so that there is every prospect of the trade being kept busy for some time to come. The old wooden buildings are disappearing, and brick ones are steadily growing in their places in all parts of the city.

The city tram-construction works, street-formation, and paving have given employment to a large number of men, and have added largely to the general prosperity of trade in the city; though it is to be regretted that so much of the rolling-stock should be imported ready-made.

There are 750 factories registered in the Wellington District this year—an increase of 57 over last year. There are 7,278 persons employed—viz., 4,540 men, 485 boys under sixteen years of age, 1,831 women, and 422 girls—an increase of 691 males and 130 females over last year's return.

The overtime difficulty is with us still, and I am inclined to think it will remain in spite of restrictions. There are trade seasons when it appears that a large amount of work must be done by overtime, because the persons employed in the factories cannot cope with it during ordinary working-hours, and employers say they cannot get extra hands to meet the extraordinary demands during those busy seasons. This is very noticeable in the tailoring trade. [For table of overtime worked during the year see page .]

Permits have been issued to 381 young persons to work in factories—viz., 186 boys and 195 girls. They passed standards as follows: Boys—63 Standard IV., 54 Standard V., 49 Standard VI., 20 Standard VII.; girls—53 Standard IV., 57 Standard V., 47 Standard VI., 38 Standard VII. Care is taken to obtain correct particulars of age and the production of school certificates before permits are issued.

There were 137 accidents reported during the year—two fatal, eleven of a serious nature, and 124 of a slight nature, incidental to factory-work where machinery is employed, and necessitating absence from work for a few days. The fatal accidents were thoroughly inquired into, and in each case a verdict of "Accidental death" was returned. The other cases were inquired into, and in every case where it was possible to guard a machine so as to minimise the risk to the worker the employer was called on to so guard his machinery at once.

There were four prosecutions during the year, and convictions and penalties were secured in each case.