

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT.

I regret to report that the system of broken time has been introduced into the district during the year. By "broken time" I mean that by assistants (junior or female) coming to work late in the morning, or by losing time during the day, they can be brought back or kept back to work at night to complete their full time; thus the shops in Newtown are kept open every night except the half-holiday night, and the assistants are in attendance till 9 o'clock. I have frequently questioned them as to the time of starting, and their answers are to the effect that they are working within their legal hours. Nevertheless it is to be regretted that the practice has come into vogue, and there is no power in the existing Act to cope with it. Overtime has increased this year in spite of my efforts to keep it down; 305 persons (women and juniors) have worked 4,882 hours, as against 247 persons working 3,010 hours last year. Section 12 of the Act is exceedingly unsatisfactory.

The question of which is the best day for the weekly half-holiday has been agitating the minds of a large number of business-people lately, and quite a number of business establishments have taken the matter up in earnest and have agreed to close their premises on Saturday from 1 o'clock. I hope they will be rewarded for their courage by the Legislature coming to their assistance and making Saturday a colonial half-holiday, with no late night; that late night is a barbarous institution—each hour that an assistant works at night is worse on her than three in the daytime. If the shops were obliged to close every evening at 6 o'clock, not one in a thousand would suffer any inconvenience after the first month.

There were two prosecutions during the year. Convictions and penalties were obtained in each case.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

This Act is working very satisfactorily. There is little trouble with it, and the only complaints I hear are from the licensees, who complain of the difficulty they have in getting servants to fill their engagements. There are thirteen offices registered in the district.

INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION ACT.

The enforcement of awards under this Act has given an enormous amount of additional work, and will take up a great deal of time. To date I have filed sixteen applications for enforcement of awards, which have been successfully adjudicated upon, and penalties and costs secured in each case, and in nine cases substantial amounts in back pay were ordered to be paid to the persons who had been short-paid.

In conclusion, I have to thank all with whom my duties have brought me into contact for their courtesy and readiness to conform to my requirements.

I have, &c.,
JAMES SHANAGHAN,
Inspector of Factories.

Edward Tregear, Esq., Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wellington, 10th May, 1904.

I have the honour to report on the carrying-out of the various awards under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act for the Wellington District during the past year.

Fifty-four alleged breaches have been filed by me for hearing by the Court; twenty-six of these have already been adjudicated upon, twenty-three being proved. The Court awarded substantial penalties in each case, besides witnesses' and other expenses; also back wages to a considerable amount.

These cases covered nearly the whole of the Wellington Industrial District, and included Wellington, Masterton, Woodville, Hastings, Napier, Palmerston North, and Foxton. The employers in most cases appear anxious to observe the law, and, indeed, they frequently report cases of other employers underpaying their workers and unfairly competing with their particular trade. There are many employers, however, in isolated districts and in small towns who have been under the impression that because they were not in business at the time the dispute was before the Court the award in their trade does not apply to them. I have explained the provisions of the Act in this respect—that an award is binding on all employers commencing business after the award is made. The greatest difficulty I have found is in obtaining information from the workers, especially in towns where there is no branch of a union. The amended Act of 1903 giving Inspectors power to make examinations of books, &c., has greatly simplified matters, and has been the means of bringing to light numerous breaches that would probably never have been detected in any other way.

The cases taken before the Court in the various towns have had a very salutary effect, and many inquiries are made by employers as to whether they are abiding by their award. I have always given any information asked for, and I also find that the *Labour Journal* containing the various awards and decisions of the Court of Arbitration is proving very useful and is much appreciated.

In the sawmilling trade some little difficulty has been experienced by employers in paying for broken time, as the award provides for a forty-six-hour week at a daily rate of pay. This does not give six days of equal length, as many mills usually work five days of eight hours and six hours on the Saturday. Employers have endeavoured to pay their men at a daily rate, and broken time then varies according to the length of the day. I have explained that in such cases wages should be computed at per hour, dividing the weekly pay by 46. Some employers have got over the difficulty by paying for the broken time at the rate of 1s. or 2s. a day more than the minimum wage. This shows a desire on the part of the employers to keep within the award.