

In trades in which the awards have provided for apprentices to be indentured some difficulty has been experienced in country districts through many employers failing to indenture their youths, who, after serving twelve months or more at the trade, have been discharged or have left of their own accord. This is greatly to be regretted, as the result has been to swell the number of incompetents; but I believe this will be rectified within a short time, as nearly all awards made by the Court provide for indenturing all apprentices.

Complaints are freely made that the great delay in obtaining the decisions of the Court causes much annoyance, as not only are workers and employers left many months before their cases are settled, but there is frequently great difficulty in obtaining witnesses, as men frequently leave for other parts of the colony. No doubt this state of affairs will be soon remedied by some other method being adopted of hearing simple breaches.

I have, &c.,
W. H. HAGGER,
Inspector of Factories.

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

SIR,—

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

I have the honour to submit my report for the year ending the 31st March, 1903.

During that period I visited factories and workrooms throughout the colony where women and girls are employed, and have found them, with few exceptions, in a very satisfactory state. Strict attention has been paid to the sanitary condition of these places, and employers show every willingness to comply with any suggestion made by Inspectors when it has been found necessary to have alterations or improvements effected.

Notwithstanding the additional restriction placed on overtime work, still the full extent allowed by the law seems to be worked. Strict attention has been given to the regular and proper payment for such overtime, and due notice given to employees previous to working such overtime.

Re section 31, compelling an annual increase of 3s. per week to persons under twenty years of age: When this section of the Act was first introduced the argument was used that it would work out to the detriment of these young workers. Still it has now been in force three years, and no radical change has taken place. These young people have gone on just as before, but are enjoying the privileges of better wages, and in very many trades many more of these young persons could be employed if they could be got. The very greatest attention has been paid to the regular payment of these increases, and, as a general rule, very few attempts to evade it have been discovered.

Some difficulty is experienced in this matter in instances where workers change their place of employment. This is especially marked in the dressmaking trade. Frequently girls have been with as many as two or three different employers in a very short space of time. To meet this difficulty I would suggest that a provision be introduced compelling these young persons to procure a certificate showing length of time at any particular trade, such certificate to be signed by their previous employer. This would not only facilitate the work of an Inspector, but would also be a great advantage to employers.

Section 17 of the Factories Act, which compels the keeping of a correct record of all wages paid, is now found to be an important section, and especially so since the introduction of section 31, providing for regular increases of wages.

Great difficulty is experienced in getting employers to keep this record, more especially with small employers, who may employ only a few young girls. It takes them a long time to realise that the interests of these few girls in a small factory are just as important as the interests of those employed in larger establishments.

The buildings where the larger industries of the colony are carried on, such as woollen-mills and clothing and boot factories, are a credit to the country. The laundries of the colony have also improved very much. They are mostly large new buildings, with all the latest improvements in the way of ventilation, sanitary arrangements, &c., for the comfort and convenience of workers. The improved machinery which has been introduced into this line of business has proved of great advantage to the employees. I may add that the introduction of improved machinery into this industry does not mean a reduction in the number of persons employed. On the contrary, more workers could be employed if they could be got.

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT AND ITS AMENDMENTS.

There is little or nothing fresh to report with regard to these Acts. They seem to be working smoothly, and most shopkeepers appear to be thoroughly acquainted with their provisions. There is, of course, still the necessity for a colonial closing-day. I should very much like to see waitresses in refreshment-rooms and hotels brought under the provisions of the Acts, just as the ordinary shop-assistant is. These girls have to work long hours, and have no Act to protect them. I have come across many instances where these girls have to keep on duty from twelve to sixteen hours, and if they are not satisfied with this their only remedy is to go to another employer, who will treat them very little better. Also the sleeping-accommodation which is provided for these workers is a matter which should receive careful consideration.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

This Act has worked smoothly during the year, there being but few complaints made against office-keepers, and even these were of a trivial nature.

I have, &c.,
M. SCOTT HAWTHORNE,
Inspector of Factories.

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