

vision in section 17 of the Act to take a poll of the electors with a view to appointing Saturday as the statutory closing-day. The general opinion of shopkeepers seems favourable to the present day (Thursday), although many seem favourable to Saturday, if there were no exemptions, and the holiday was made universal.

There is a movement on foot amongst the occupiers of shops in several trades to take advantage of section 25 of the Act and limit the hours for doing business, and several "Requisitions" are now in circulation, drawn up by a majority of the shopkeepers in the respective trades, with the object of fixing the time for closing.

At the present time there are seven trades which have adopted the early-closing movement provided for in section 25—viz., jewellers, chemists, boot and shoe dealers, and cycle-dealers of Christchurch City; grocers and storekeepers of New Brighton; grocers and storekeepers of Sumner; and general storekeepers of Riccarton Road district. These regulations are generally observed without much difficulty, although, of course, there are those who are bad timekeepers, and who are surprised when they are reminded of closing-hour, &c.

The administration of this Act generally has given very little trouble, and, although there have been rather a large number of prosecutions, it must be remembered that breaches are more easily detected under this Act than under some others. 1,350 shops are on the register in this district, in which 2,482 assistants are engaged—viz., 1,750 males and 732 females, there being also 1,416 employers. It is to be hoped that the Legislature will provide in any future amendment of the Act for the compulsory keeping of time and wages books, which would materially assist Inspectors in ascertaining the actual time worked on each day by the assistants. I think, also, that some provision should be made in any future amendment making it compulsory for shopkeepers carrying on business on a floor above the ground floor to provide efficient fire-escapes, as in the event of any outbreak of fire there is danger of great loss of life, not only amongst the assistants, but the customers also.

Due attention has been paid to the sanitary condition of shops, especially in regard to separate conveniences for male and females; and also in respect to the seating-accommodation.

During the year I received a number of complaints *re* the long hours worked in the wholesale warehouses, but, unfortunately, such places are especially exempted from the operations of the Act, so I was unable to alleviate the conditions of the employees.

Overtime.—A limited amount of overtime has been worked in shops. The provision in the Act for compulsory payment of time and a half for all overtime worked has had a good effect. Altogether 1,000 shop-assistants—viz., 741 males and 259 females—worked 10,270 hours.

Prosecutions.—It has been necessary to take 53 cases before the Court for breaches of this Act; 52 convictions were obtained, and one case was dismissed. The following is a summary of the breaches: 4 for employing assistants for more than fifty-two hours per week, 3 for failing to pay assistants for overtime worked, 3 for employing assistants for more than eleven hours, 5 for failing to close on statutory closing-day, 5 for failing to close in accordance with requisition of the trade, 5 for failing to grant hotel-assistants a half-holiday, 14 for employing assistants after the prescribed time, 9 for employing assistants on statutory closing-day, 2 for delivering goods on statutory holiday. (For particulars, see "Legal Decisions.")

INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION ACT.

The administration of this Act and its awards entails an immense amount of work on the part of Inspectors and others. Many of the unions have banded together, however, and have adopted the practice of employing a salaried secretary. I find that where the employers and employees are properly organized there is less wilful breaking of an award or agreement, and it is generally found that employers and workers alike have very little sympathy for those detected in committing breaches.

The Amendment Act of 1908, giving Magistrates power to hear enforcement cases, has enabled breaches to be adjudicated upon within a reasonable time of the committal of the offence, and witnesses and others are better able to remember more fully any particulars in regard to the breaches.

During the year 399 complaints by secretaries and others have been inquired into, in addition to the usual inquiry that is made during factory-inspection, and it has been found necessary to take 110 cases of breaches of award before the Court—72 against the employers and 38 against the employees—the Department getting judgment in 104 cases, 5 being dismissed, and 1 judgment still reserved. Of the 5 cases dismissed, at least 2 of them were taken to obtain an interpretation of the Court.

Thirty-three cases were settled by the Department by the payment of arrears of wages, amounting to £97; and of the remaining complaints many were very trivial and were at once corrected, or no offence had been committed.

The provision of the Act making it compulsory for occupiers of factories and shops to keep posted up in a conspicuous position a copy of the award governing their trade, and also the provision providing for the keeping of wages and overtime books, must have a very beneficial effect, enabling workers, whether members of the union or not, to peruse the conditions under which they are required to work, and enabling Inspectors to ascertain more correctly what are the wages being paid to the various employees.

During the year a number of complaints were made by unions *re* the employment of members of occupier's family, &c., in contravention of the award, and of the failure of some employers to indenture their own sons as apprentices. Fortunately, we have been able to settle these matters amicably; but, although there are always two sides to a question, it seems somewhat hard that an employer should be compelled to indenture his son, or to employ some other person in preference to his son, or risk being brought before the Court for failing to give preference to unionists, or to pay the minimum wage, &c. Employers naturally enough consider that members of their families under the age of twenty-one years should be exempt from the operations of any award.