

FACTORIES ACT.

This Act is, as usual, working very smoothly, and there is very little difficulty in administering it. All parties are familiar with its provisions, and it is rarely that an attempt at evading its provisions is made.

During the first half of the year just ended, the wave of industrial depression affected the continuity of the employment of many of our factory employees very materially. Fortunately that condition has changed for the better, and while there are still empty seats, it is satisfactory to know that the industrial prospects are brightening, and a steady demand for skilled hands is setting in.

We have registered 1,539 factories, an increase of 37 over last year, but while the number of factories has increased there has been a decrease of 132 in the number of employees—viz., an increase of 3 males and a decrease of 135 females. The increase of registered factories and a decrease of workers is explained by the fact that when workers were retrenched during the depression period many of them started for themselves, in many cases working as partners, while others drifted in various avenues away from factory life.

Permits to young persons under sixteen to work in factories have been issued to 250 boys and 245 girls. Due care is taken to ascertain the age of all applicants for permits, and to have their standard certificates produced, but considerable trouble is experienced in dealing with boys and girls who are over or about fifteen years of age, and who in many cases have not passed the Third Standard. The number of such cases that come to light is astonishing. The children have evidently been taken away at an early age to fill the position of errand-boys or nurse-girls, and when they have outgrown their usefulness in that sphere or want more money for their services they are sent adrift, and turn to factory life. There is a decrease in the number of permits issued of 41 as against the number issued last year—viz., 33 boys and 8 girls.

One thousand nine hundred and fifty-four boys under sixteen years and women worked 46,868 hours' overtime. One noticeable feature is that in laundry-work 188 women worked 3,856 hours, an average of 20½ hours each. Some people will no doubt attribute this falling-off to the Chinese laundries, but I think it is chiefly due to the fact that white shirts are not nearly so generally used as formerly, and that is an important factor in reducing laundry-work.

There are 36 Chinese laundries in the city, and they are all doing a fair amount of work, but they nearly all say they are not busy—that they lose plenty of time because they frequently have no work. Of course, when they have work to do they will do it late and early; thus the impression is that they are always working, which is not the case.

There have been 303 accidents reported, of which 1 was fatal—viz., an apprentice was killed at an engineering establishment by a superheater falling on him. Inquiry has been made in every case, and everything possible has been done to minimise the risk of the workers, and inquiries made in respect to workers' compensation.

There were 11 cases taken before the Court for breaches of the Act. In 9 cases convictions were secured and fines inflicted, 1 case was dismissed, and the other withdrawn.

The sum of £11 19s. 6d. was paid into the Department by employers as arrears of wages due to workers, and in turn paid out to the workers.

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

There were registered last year 1,222 shops.

The general provisions of this Act are very well observed. There are two decidedly weak points in this Act—one is that there is no provision for time and wages book in the shop section of the Act, and consequently there is difficulty experienced in ascertaining what wages are actually paid for overtime. The other weak point is section 23, which provides for a half-holiday for hotel assistants; it is altogether too vague.

Six hundred and twenty-one persons have worked 9,535 hours' overtime—viz., 277 men have worked 6,537 hours, and 344 women have worked 2,998 hours.

Fourteen cases of breach of the Act were brought before the Court. Convictions and penalties were secured in 13 cases, and 1 case was dismissed.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

Very little trouble is experienced in the administration of this Act. There have been very few complaints in regard to the working of it, and in no case has a breach of the Act been discovered, the complaints sustained being of a nature that did not come within the scope of the Act. There has been only one case taken before the Court; a conviction was secured, and the maximum penalty inflicted on defendant for carrying on business and collecting fees without a license under the Act.

INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION ACT.

For various reasons the enforcement of awards and industrial agreements is more difficult than the carrying-out of the Acts above referred to, owing to there being many technicalities in connection with the different trades.

During the year 702 cases were reported by secretaries of unions or discovered by Inspectors in the course of their inspections. Of this number, 173 were dealt with by the Courts; 87 cases were dealt with out of Court, and £159 19s. 6d. paid in as arrears of wages due to workers; and 284 cases when inquired into were found not to constitute a breach of award, and consequently no action was taken, and the remainder (58) are pending. Some are already filed for hearing, and others are being investigated.