

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

All shops in this district have been inspected during the year, and where deemed necessary instructions to carry out improvements have been given. Special attention has been paid to sanitary arrangements and ventilation of shops, and also to the sitting-accommodation provided for females. Wages paid to young persons have also received the attention of the Department, and it was found that in almost all shops more than the minimum wage fixed by the Act has been paid. Occupiers are well acquainted with the provisions of the Act, and very little difficulty has been experienced in carrying out its provisions. The only trouble experienced has been in respect to the closing of shops at the hour fixed by "requisition" of the shopkeepers in various trades. Many shopkeepers, even those who have been amongst the majority that signed the requisition, are reluctant to close, and their shops are frequently found open after the required time of closing. Many prosecutions have been taken, but these, I am sorry to say, have not yet had the desired effect, and warnings are repeatedly being given to shopkeepers for offending in this way.

Difficulty is being experienced in enforcing section 25 (8), which makes it unlawful for the occupier of any shop to sell tobacco, &c., after the hour fixed by requisition for closing tobacconists' shops. Chinese fruiterers all sell such goods, and in many cases they continue to do so after 8 p.m. (the hour fixed), but it is exceedingly difficult to detect breaches of this nature. Several prosecutions have been taken against Chinamen for this offence, and to some extent these have had the desired effect, but a certain number of illicit sales still take place.

Section 23 of the Act, providing for a weekly half-holiday for hotel employees, has given satisfaction to the various persons concerned, but so far as night porters are concerned the half-holiday seems rather a farce. These men usually commence work at 10 p.m. and cease work at 8 a.m., but if on the day of the half-holiday they start work at 12 midnight, instead of 10 p.m., they receive their half-holiday so far as compliance with the Act is concerned, although in reality they only get two hours off. These workers, who are required to work every night of the week, should be allowed something more than a "half-holiday" of two hours. I think the Act should be amended so that such workers get at least time off equal to other hotel workers.

There were 1,538 shops registered during the year, in which were engaged 4,065 persons, including working occupiers. The total wages paid was £238,680.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

No difficulty has been experienced in carrying out the provisions of this Act. There were no prosecutions. Eight offices were registered during the year.

I have, &c.,

C. E. ALDRIDGE,

Inspector of Factories.

The Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wellington, 20th April, 1910.

I beg to submit for your consideration my report on the administration of the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act in Wellington and suburbs for the year ending 31st March, 1910.

On the whole, the period under review does not present any remarkable features. There has not been any serious disturbance in the labour world, and matters have progressed with more smoothness than has been the case in previous years. The winter was perhaps one of the worst, from an industrial point of view, which has been experienced for many years past. During prosperous years it has been predicted that the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act would fail in a period of depression. It can safely be said that such has not, at all events yet, been the case, as there is no doubt that the awards in force during the period of financial depression last year had the effect of keeping the rate of wages at a level which could not otherwise have been maintained. As an indication in that direction, I would point out that only four permits to work for less than award rates have been issued by me during the year. One of these was to a man seventy years of age, and the others to youths just out of their time.

The provisions of the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act Amendment Act of 1908 providing that enforcements of awards can be taken before Magistrates have now had a fair trial, and, while in some respects it may be said to be an improvement, there are several unsatisfactory features to be noted. In Wellington during the year there have been three different Magistrates dealing with breaches of awards, and each has adopted a different method with them. The result has been that where one Magistrate would fine 10s. another would fine £10 for a similar breach, and one of the Magistrates while on the bench frankly stated that he knew nothing about these industrial cases, and said he hoped that the parties concerned would appeal against his decision, and he would be very pleased if they did so. At the beginning of the year a number of employers were fined £10 each for various breaches, and this had the effect of making employers careful to observe the award. Since that time, however, the fines inflicted have been much smaller, and not sufficient to act as a deterrent; consequently there is an inducement for a certain class of employer to take the risk, knowing that even if discovered the fine will be a small one.

The present method of collecting fines is not very satisfactory. The person fined has the option of paying the fine at either the Stipendiary Magistrate's Court or the Labour Department. I think it would be an improvement if the Act were altered to provide that the fines be collected by the police in the same way as for a breach of the Shops and Offices Act, the Factories Act, &c. The police have greater facilities for this work than the Department has.

I wish to call your attention to the fact that there are quite a number of what may be termed "poor employers," who enter into business without capital or means of any kind. They employ labour,