

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

This Act has been very well observed, considering the large number of different trades coming under its provisions and the many non-employers of labour who formerly had very little knowledge of the labour laws.

The early-closing movement seems to be gaining ground, as each year there are additions to the number of trades in which the shopkeepers have availed themselves of section 25 of the Act and fixed their closing-hours by majority requisitions. The following trades are closing early under these requisitions: In Christchurch—Jewellers, boot and shoe dealers, chemists, butchers, cycle and motor dealers, grocers, hairdressers and tobacconists. In Woolston, New Brighton, Sumner, Spreydon, Riccarton, and Heathcote—General storekeepers.

There were 1,448 shops registered, employing 2,209 males and 1,218 females.

As usual there were a number of those shopkeepers who were careless or ignorant of the law, who failed to close on the statutory holiday, or to close according to the requisitions of the various trades, in which it was necessary for proceedings to be taken. Sixty cases were taken before the Court, and judgment in favour of the Department was given in every case. The penalties amounted to £43 8s. The amount of £52 3s., arrears of wages, was also collected by the Department, and paid over to the various assistants. The following is a list of the cases taken before the Court for offences under this Act: Failing to close in accordance with requisition, 10; employing assistants for more than fifty-two hours a week, 6; failing to allow assistants a half-holiday, 12; failing to keep a time and wages book, 8; employing assistants for more than eleven hours in one day, 6; employing assistants later than thirty minutes after the prescribed time, 4; failing to close on statutory closing-day, 10; failing to pay wages in full at not longer than fortnightly intervals, 2; employing female assistants in hotels for more than fifty-eight hours a week, 2: total, 60.

Overtime worked by shop-assistants on stocktaking and other special work: 1,256 assistants worked during the year 20,570 hours—viz., 726 males, 12,846 hours; and 530 females, 7,724 hours. This shows a considerable increase over the preceding year.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

Licensees of servants' registry offices have satisfactorily complied with the provisions of the Act. Periodical inspection of the engagement-books has been made by Inspectors, and it was found that the charges for engagements were not in excess of the schedule of rates provided in the Act. Ten licenses were issued during the year—6 renewals and 4 new licenses. During the year the registry offices referred to made 5,346 engagements; of these, 5,320 workers were charged fees amounting to £870 15s. 8d.; and 5,335 employers were charged fees amounting to £890 15s.

I would suggest that the regulations be amended so that registers kept by registry-office keepers should show date of engagements and the fees paid by workers and employers. The present book of engagements, as laid down by the Act, does not make such provision.

WORKERS' DWELLINGS ACT, 1910.

A number of workers have availed themselves of the provisions of the 1910 Act, and applications for dwellings were dealt with by the Workers' Dwellings Board of this district. Fourteen cottages have been built—viz., 11 at Sydenham, and 3 at Addington. These cottages are nearly all completed, and many of them have just been taken possession of by the buyers.

The ceremony of laying the foundation-stone to commemorate the erection of the first dwelling under the new Act of 1910 was performed by the Hon. J. A. Millar, late Minister of Labour, and great interest was evinced in the proceedings. The date of the ceremony was the 21st November, 1911.

SCAFFOLDING INSPECTION ACT.

The inspection of scaffolding erected in connection with buildings, &c., has been carefully attended to, and has caused general satisfaction to the workers whose employment compels them to work on scaffolding, sometimes at great heights. Careful inspection has been made of all gear used in such scaffolding. The employers seem quite anxious to do their part, and, except in a few instances, have complied well with the law. The Scaffolding Inspector also made inspection at the various towns outside of Christchurch coming within his jurisdiction. Mr. Stringer, the Inspector, has made out a separate detailed report of the work done under this Act.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION ACT.

Workers have availed themselves of the provisions of this Act, and many settlements have been effected without recourse to the Arbitration Court. It has come to my knowledge that a tendency exists of insurance companies trying to effect settlements with workers in cases where the accidents caused only temporary disablement by paying some small sum consisting of the amount then due, and requesting a clearance. In some such cases the workers have accepted payment, and afterwards found that their injuries incapacitated them for a longer period than at first thought: in these cases they had no redress.

GENERAL.

The work of the Department steadily increases as the operations of the various labour laws are extended. The amendments to the Shops and Offices Act, bringing all workers in hotels under the Act, and the amendment to the Workers' Compensation Act of last year, have also increased the responsibilities of the various officers.

The correspondence has been considerable. The outgoing letters, &c., number 5,150; circulars, 9,815; and telegrams, 610.