

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

The Department has no accurate record as to the number of shops and the number of assistants employed therein, but from the information available it is estimated that there were during the year 28,627 shops throughout New Zealand, of which 14,173 (approximately one-half) were carried on without assistants. In the shops with assistants it is estimated there were employed 25,370 males and 23,262 females.

During the year visits of inspection to the number of 12,145 were made.

Prosecutions numbered 395; convictions were obtained in 347 cases. A number of cases were withdrawn; fines totalled £336 6s.

Complaints were received respecting 1,748 alleged breaches of the Act, resulting in 187 prosecutions and 882 warnings. In 496 cases investigations showed that no breach had been committed, while in the remaining cases no action was considered necessary. Two hundred and eight prosecutions were instituted for breaches which were discovered by Inspectors, and warnings were given in other cases, being either first offences or of a minor nature.

One hundred requisitions were served on occupiers of shops to comply with various requirements of the Act, such as for sanitary conveniences, heating-appliances, lunch-room or seating accommodation, ventilation, and partitions.

SHOPS AND OFFICES AMENDMENT ACT, 1936.

The provisions of the Act—excepting the shorter working-week, which operated from 1st September, 1936—came into force on the 1st July, 1936.

Hours.—In respect of hours of work it is provided that a shop-assistant shall not be employed for more than forty-four hours a week, eight hours a day (except on one day, when the employment may be for eleven hours), nor more than four hours and a quarter continuously without an interval of one hour for a meal, nor after 12 noon on the half-holiday. As in some shops an arrangement under which an assistant shall not be employed for more than four hours and a quarter, without an interval of at least one hour for a meal, may not be altogether practicable, it is prescribed that, provided that a ten-minutes rest period is given, assistants may work up to five hours without a meal. For hotel and restaurant employees there is provided (a) a forty-four hour week, (b) an eight-hour day, (c) not more than four hours and a quarter without an interval of one hour for a meal (except that this may be extended to five hours if a rest period of ten minutes is given), and (d) a half-holiday from 1 p.m. on one day of each week, and also (e) a six-day working-week. Other amendments relating to hours are that butchers' assistants shall not commence work before 6 a.m., instead of 4 a.m. as formerly; that in regard to assistants engaged in the delivery of milk an earlier starting-time than 3 a.m. is permitted in accordance with conditions approved by the Minister, while the prohibition of the employment of female assistants in a restaurant after 10.30 p.m. was extended to boys under eighteen years.

Overtime.—The permission of the Inspector is to be obtained before any overtime is worked in shops; overtime time-rates were increased from 9d. and 1s. to 1s. 6d. per hour or time and a half, whichever is the greater; and the total amount of overtime that may be worked in any year was reduced from 120 to 60 hours. In hotels and restaurants the total amount of overtime that may be worked in any year is reduced from 180 to 120 hours, and the minimum overtime rate is increased from 9d. to 1s. 6d. per hour.

Wages.—Increases in the minimum rates of wages on the same basis as contained in the Factories Amendment Act, 1936, are provided for—i.e., such amount as is agreed on, being not less than 15s. a week for the first six months, with half-yearly increments on the agreed rate of not less than 4s. a week until the end of the third year, and thereafter not less than £2 per week. In determining the rates of pay due to any worker all periods of employment in any shop whatsoever shall be taken into consideration.

Payment of Premiums.—The practice of premiums being asked for in respect of the learning of the ladies' hairdressing trade, &c., received attention, the occupier of a shop being prohibited from accepting a premium from any person, whether a shop-assistant or not, in respect of any tuition in any trade or calling given to any person, with an exception, however, in respect of schools for the teaching of any trade, provided that written contracts are entered into between the parties and that the conditions not only of the contract, but also in respect of facilities for learning the trade, are to the satisfaction of the Chief Inspector of Factories.

Definitions.—The definitions of "restaurant" and "shop" were amended to include boarding-houses employing two or more assistants other than members of the family of the occupier, or with five or more boarders. (The principal Act applied to boardinghouses in which three or more persons were employed other than members of the family of the occupier.)

Offices.—The exemption from the hours of closing of offices contained in section 46 of the Act is removed in respect of auctioneers, banks, insurance companies, and wholesale warehousemen. Offices in industries where it is necessary to deal with the public in the evenings, such as shipping, railway, tramway, newspaper, telegraph agencies, cable companies, or telegraph companies, or freezing companies or forwarding agencies or Harbour Boards, wool-brokers or wool-buyers, are exempt from closing their offices at 5 p.m. and at noon on Saturdays. This exemption is extended to passenger-transport services and offices of auctioneers situated in stock saleyards, as it is necessary in such cases to attend to the public after 5 p.m. and on Saturday afternoons.

Other provisions provide for all offices covered by the Act and not exempted from the closing provisions to close at 12 noon on the half-holiday instead of 1 p.m.; for overtime to be worked in banks for any of the special purposes mentioned, overtime for any such time worked to be paid in accordance