

would greatly stop the underselling and unfair competition of traders. It would, however, be much more to the advantage of the Auckland worker than to that of his Dunedin brother, for the circumstances of the dweller in the severer climate would make him insist on a wage that would be comparative wealth to any one living under easier conditions. In the South Island an award that would give a fair equal wage at once to the worker on the rugged wet West Coast and to the labourer or factory-hand in Christchurch would be difficult to construct. The machinery of the present Act rests largely on the idea of local interests being specially provided for, but if on mature consideration that idea is found to be detrimental to the best interests of the working-classes the whole Act should be remodelled.

It has been suggested that entire alteration in the system of Conciliation Boards is necessary, and I am of opinion that the arguments adduced for such change are so strong as to be worthy the serious attention of the Government. The proposed alteration is, however, of so sweeping a nature, and would require such extensive modification of the existing Act, that great consideration should be given to the subject before we displace our present machinery (which works, if imperfectly) and set up something else, as yet untried, in its place. Nevertheless, the new proposal has every appearance of promising improvement. It is as follows: Instead of a permanent and continuous Board of Conciliation in each district, let there be a Board appointed for each dispute, such Board to consist of men acquainted with the technicalities of the trade the case concerns. Two persons appointed by labour in that trade, and two others appointed by employers in that trade, with an impartial chairman, to form the Board. Such a Board, both on the scores of economy and experience, would be more competent and carry more weight in its recommendation than a Board constituted under the present Act. Much time is now wasted when, say, a tailor, a baker, a butcher, and a carter, with a clergyman or lawyer in the chair, have to decide on technical points of dispute concerning, say, bootmakers, wharf-labourers, or printers. They know absolutely nothing even of the A B C of such employments. Even if costly experts are called in to assist and explain terms and systems to the Board, time and money are lost. If this could be avoided by having Conciliation Boards of experts in each particular case, the gain is evident. On the other hand, it is certain that there would be some drawbacks to the proposed scheme, even if they are not apparent at this moment. The thoughtful opinions of men whose interests are likely to be affected should be invited before so far-reaching an alteration is attempted.

Suggestions for still another vital amendment have been received from different localities and from representatives of both employers and employed. It is that, in case both parties to a dispute agree, the Conciliation Board should be passed by altogether, and the case commenced in the Arbitration Court. There is no doubt that valuable time is lost by suitors before the Conciliation Board when there is an expressed determination by one party or the other not to take notice of the Board's recommendation whatever it may be, but to proceed to the Arbitration Court for the sake of the power to bind possessed by the Court and not by the Board. The institution of Conciliation Boards is an integral portion of the Act as it now stands, and their abolition cannot be considered until public opinion has pronounced them obsolete. However, the suggestion that the Conciliation Board should be passed by if both parties agree to go direct to the Arbitration Court is one that would not prevent the principle of conciliation being applied in ordinary cases, and has great advantages under some conditions.

Other points of amendment that have been recommended by the trades conference and other representative bodies are: (1.) That any employers or firm of employers commencing business during the currency of an award or industrial agreement shall be bound by such award or agreement. (2.) That trade-unions shall have power under the Act to grant clearances to members leaving one district for another. (3.) That counsel be prohibited from appearing in cases of breaches of awards or industrial agreement without the consent of both parties. (4.) That the words, "An Act to encourage the Formation of Industrial Unions and Associations," should appear in title of the Act. (5.) That industrial unions shall be registered for at least three months before being permitted to vote for members of the Conciliation Board. (6.) That the sittings of the Court be held at intervals of not more than three months. (7.) That a technical error or informality in filing notice of a breach of award or industrial agreement shall not invalidate the notice. (8.) That an award given in chief centre of an industrial district shall apply to all in that trade in the whole district. (9.) That Inspectors under the Act or other persons should be instructed to enforce awards or industrial agreements. (10.) That on expiry of an award or industrial agreement it shall be deemed to be in force until another award or industrial agreement is entered into. (11.) That Government be bound by the provisions of the Act and by awards and industrial agreements in the trade affected. (12.) That the administration of the Conciliation and Arbitration Act and other labour laws be under the control of the Labour Department. I may add in explanation of the last recommendation that the expenses of the Act are borne by the vote of the Department of Labour, and that at present there is a divided authority between the Registrar of Friendly Societies and the Secretary of the Labour Department. If by any means the executive and pecuniary controls could be united in one officer the arrangement would in all probability simplify the working of the statute.

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACTS.

I have already alluded (in the paragraphs relating to factories) to the necessity for an Act that should consolidate these Acts and render them more capable of comprehension. In regard to amendment, I make the following suggestions: Some limit to the hours that men are allowed to work in shops should be fixed. Both for the sake of health and of social needs the time of a shop-assistant should not be wholly absorbed by work, and it is of no use giving a weekly half-holiday if the other working-days are extended till more weekly time is put in than before the holiday was given. The best check on too long hours, and the fairest system for the assistants of both sexes, is for an enactment to direct that all overtime shall be paid for at the rate of time and a half, with