

The Employment of Boys or Girls without Payment Prevention Act came into operation during the year, and I am pleased to say caused very little trouble in this district. As a matter of fact, the measure was cheerfully met by the principal employers, and in three cases only have I heard of an employer not paying, and in each case when I pointed out his liability the wages were paid. Therefore I have not had occasion to prosecute any one for a breach of that Act. When the Bill was before Parliament one of the strongest arguments used against it was that it would do great harm to young persons of both sexes by depriving them of work, as employers would only employ those persons who knew something of the work they were expected to do. But what are the facts? There is considerable difficulty in getting either boys or girls between the ages of fourteen and sixteen years to work in the factories to learn their trade; and the number of permits granted to young persons under section 58 this year has exceeded that of last year by twenty-five, the increase being all on the girls' side (thirty-four). Taking the dressmaking trade, for example: Last year in Wellington there were seventy-six girls between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, of whom thirty-four received from 3s. 6d. to 9s. per week, fifteen received from 2s. 6d. to 5s. per week, and twenty-seven were not paid for their services. This year there are seventy-nine girls between fourteen and sixteen years of age, of whom sixty are paid from 4s. to 7s. per week, and nineteen are paid 4s. per week; so that the Act has not injuriously affected the persons most concerned in this district.

There is no increase in the number of factories registered this year, but there is a small increase of 138 in the number of employés—nine males and 129 females. There are 550 factories and workrooms, employing 5,908 persons—4,169 males and 1,739 females. There are several workrooms that usually come under the Act during the winter season, but are not employing any one at present, so are not registered, but they will come in again.

PERMITS.

Permits under section 58 have been issued to 306 young persons—viz., 158 boys and 148 girls. Of the boys, seventy-three passed the Fourth Standard, thirty the Fifth, twenty-six the Sixth, and twenty-nine the Seventh. Of the girls, fifty-seven passed the Fourth, forty-two the Fifth, thirty-two the Sixth, and seventeen the Seventh. Care is taken to ascertain the correct ages in all cases, and that they have passed the standard as required by law. Seventy permits have been declined—fifty boys and twenty girls.

OVERTIME.

Overtime, as already stated, is steadily increasing. Permits have been granted to 1,362 persons to work 39,689 hours during the year. Due care is taken to see that the twenty-eight days' limit is not exceeded, and no permits are granted for later than 9 p.m. Overtime entails a considerable amount of additional labour and inspection—to keep records, and see that the permits are not abused by the employés being kept later than the time granted on the permits. This means a considerable amount of night-work. The following table shows the number of persons working overtime in the various trades (of course no notice is taken of males over sixteen years of age, who do not require a permit to work overtime):—

	Persons.	Hours.
Tailoring (factories)	365	17,777
" (order work)	115	2,792
Dressmakers	276	3,696
Laundries	207	5,724
Waterproof clothing	68	4,455
Woollen-mills	48	1,289
Printing, &c.	98	1,064
Shirtmaking	25	1,064
Wax vesta	51	492
Bootmaking	41	301
Packing, &c.	31	315
Saddlery	5	226
Seven other trades combined	32	494

ACCIDENTS.

There were fifty-seven accidents in factories reported during the year, three of them being of a serious nature: A youth got his arm severely cut by a circular saw he was using. A young woman received a serious injury to her hand through it being caught in the rollers of a steam-mangle; fortunately the mangle was cold, or she would have lost her hand. The other case was that of a young girl who received severe injuries through her clothes catching in the cog-wheels of a machine by which she was working: in this case I prosecuted the employer for failing to guard his machinery, but lost my case on legal points raised by counsel for defence. The remaining fifty-four cases were of a very slight nature, consisting of cuts and bruises incidental to persons engaged in active work or amongst machinery, and necessitating in most cases a few days' absence from work. In each inquiry was made into the circumstances of the accident.

There were only five cases taken into Court during the year, and convictions were obtained in three of them. The other two were dismissed without costs.

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT.

This Act is working very smoothly at present, so far as the weekly half-holiday and working-hours are concerned, but it is so full of weak points that it will never work satisfactorily until it is amended and consolidated, and put into practical form. At present you never know when some new point will be raised against you, and you are called upon to make a half-hearted or diplomatic