

Although it would, no doubt, be better if overtime could be abolished, still, under the existing restrictions of the Act, and the payments provided, I do not consider that any great hardship is inflicted, and it would certainly be a great drawback on employers, especially in the busy season, if it was abolished, as at certain times it would be impossible to find suitable hands to meet the work in ordinary hours; and, in view of an after-holiday, the extra pay is very acceptable to employees. The amended clause providing that notice to work overtime shall be given to employees on the day previous, or that a sufficient meal be provided in lieu thereof, is very beneficial.

Seventy accidents have been reported and inquired into—one fatal, a man being smothered by a fall of coal. There were a few rather severe injuries. One man, through getting caught in an elevator, had his arm severely crushed, necessitating amputation; some others, through getting foul of machinery, lost fingers, and had other rather severe hurts. The majority were very slight, and what might be termed “purely accidental,” which could not be foreseen by any guarding of machinery.

New buildings are still going up, and, as the owners now know what is required, and submit plans to this Department, a great improvement in factory conditions is being effected. In this portion of my work I receive very great assistance from Mr. Maxwell, City Building Inspector, who kindly places his services at my disposal, personally superintending the erection of fire-escapes, sanitary or other requirements necessary.

Sanitary conditions have been strictly looked after, and I wish to record the very great assistance given to me by the District Health Officer, Dr. Makgill, and his assistants; also the local city officials.

Fifteen charges were preferred against five employers. There were seven convictions, and, with the consent of the presiding Magistrate, eight were withdrawn upon the condition that the defendants paid all costs, and full scale of overtime payment to workers, as per charges. It is rarely necessary to resort to prosecuting, and I am in hopes that it will still become less.

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT.

There is very little to report concerning the carrying-out of the existing provisions of this Act, and any attempts at breaches or evasions are comparatively rare. But I cannot say that it is in general satisfactory, or gives the necessary protection to employers and employees. To do this there ought to be a regular hour for closing, and the statutory hours for workers should be continuous, and finished within a given time, and not as at present, when an employer can let off hands during the slack portion of the day and bring them back nightly to complete the full complement of time. This can be seen nightly here, and is very severe on female employees.

It also appears to be an anomaly that it is compulsory under the Factories Act that workers are to be paid a certain scale of wages, whilst shop-hands can be worked longer hours at more arduous and trying work without any payment, or what it is optional for an employer to pay. This is especially applicable to females and young persons.

I am of opinion that it is very necessary that restaurant and other workers should be brought more directly under this Act; but I am aware that you are in possession of knowledge of these requirements, and I trust that you will give them consideration.

I do not consider that the present system of small shopkeepers choosing any day of the week for closing is satisfactory, and it certainly renders it almost impossible for an Inspector to give it effective supervision. The definition of “closing” requires to be more definite, as at present it admits of evasion.

Warrants were issued during the year for overtime in shops to eighty-five females, who worked 729 hours.

During the year there were three charges against two employers, and convictions were obtained in each case.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

I have had a few complaints from persons who stated that when they reported themselves for work where they were sent by licensees they were informed that there were no vacancies, or that the work was different to what was represented. If, after inquiries, I found that such complaints were correct, I insisted on the licensee refunding the fee charged and expenses incurred.

It would be better if it was compulsory to charge employers the same fee as servants, as it would make the employment more certain.

There are in this district at present twenty-one licensed registry offices, being a reduction of four on previous year.

I have, &c.,

H. FERGUSON,

Inspector of Factories.

Edward Tregear, Esq., Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.

WELLINGTON.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wellington, 14th April, 1903.

I beg to submit my report for the year ending the 31st March, 1903, and am pleased to state that factory matters are in a satisfactory and progressive condition. Trade has been so good in all branches of manufacturing that our factories have been kept very busy during the year, and the only complaint heard from occupiers has been the difficulty they have in getting young people to work in the factories. The only trades that have been slack during the year are the boot and iron trades. The cause in the first case is due largely to the market being so well