

## SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

This Act continues, with few exceptions, to work satisfactorily, and very little difficulty is experienced in enforcing its provisions. In my report of last year reference was made to section 25, subsection (8) of the Act, prohibiting the occupier of any shop who sells tobacco, cigars, and cigarettes from selling such articles after the hour fixed by requisition (drawn up by a majority of the shopkeepers themselves, and gazetted) for closing tobacconist's shops. In my opinion this amendment was very necessary, in justice to the tobacconists required to close, but it should be made to apply to all trades—for example, a confectioner who sells a small line of groceries may continue to sell such groceries after the hour fixed by requisition (where such exists) for closing grocers' shops, or a grocer who sells ironmongery may do so after the hour fixed for closing of ironmongers' shops.

Section 23, providing for a weekly half-holiday for all hotel-assistants, has been an advantage to them, although some hotelkeepers adopted many means of evading the provision, and thereby deprived their assistants from getting their weekly half-holiday. Such a provision as this is somewhat difficult to enforce as no day is fixed, and the employer can give any day each week he chooses. Further difficulty is experienced in the fact that employees, naturally enough no doubt, in most cases do not care to complain or give evidence if the half-holiday is not given. However, I think it may be said that the Act in this respect is fairly well complied with.

Some little difficulty has been experienced in regard to the closing of shops under requisition punctually, and in order to see that this requirement is carried out the Department's officials have to be continually on the alert, especially as there are so many different times for closing in the various trades ranging from 6 till 10 p.m.

There were 1,162 shops entered on the register during the year, in which were engaged 1,588 male and 693 female assistants and 1,256 employers.

## SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

There are 15 servants' registry-offices registered under this Act. Keepers of these places are desirous of observing the law, and no difficulty is therefore experienced in seeing that the provisions of the Act are carried out. Complaints are occasionally received from servants who are found situations, who have accepted and paid for same, and who afterwards refuse to take them. These persons usually want their fee back, no doubt on the ground that the positions offered are not satisfactory, and if it is refused they come to the Department with a complaint. Inquiries are made, and in any case where hardship seems to have occurred we endeavour to adjust matters.

The licensees of these offices at first took exception to the amended scale of fees chargeable, but they are now charging employers for finding them servants, and, although the fee payable by the servants is reduced by one half, the fee charged to the employer compensates for this. Under the old scale the employer was usually not charged a fee at all, and the servant was charged double what they are now.

I have, &c.,

C. E. ALDRIDGE,

The Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.

Inspector of Factories.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wellington, 14th April, 1909.

I have the honour to forward herewith my report for the year ending 31st March, 1909, of the administration of the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, and also of the various awards and industrial agreements in force in the City of Wellington and suburbs.

The amendment passed last year providing that cases of alleged breaches of awards may be heard by Magistrates has proved a great improvement in one respect—namely, that the delays that were such a disappointing feature previously do not now occur, and the cases are heard while the facts are fresh and all the evidence available.

The provision that all employers bound by awards must keep a wages and overtime book will also be of great assistance in the administration of the Act. During the course of my investigations I have been surprised at the number of business men who keep their wages-book in a very perfunctory manner, and in some cases have not kept a wages-book at all, simply entering the wages paid in a lump sum in their cash-book. Under these circumstances it has been difficult, if not impossible, to get at the facts of any particular case. This sort of thing cannot continue under present conditions, as any employer failing to keep a proper wages and overtime book is liable to prosecution.

The year has again been a very busy one. This is clearly shown by the analysis of investigations made, a feature of which is the large number of slight breaches of awards which have been settled by the Department without recourse to the Court. These breaches were in most cases of a trivial nature, and were considered to be the result of carelessness or ignorance rather than of deliberate intent. I have, of course, met with cases where deliberate breaches have been committed, the employer taking the risk of being caught; but these have been followed by prosecutions.

The preference-to-unionists provision has been very prominent during the year. The various employers' associations and many private employers have displayed some opposition to its inclusion in awards. There has been a large number of enforcement cases for breaches of this clause, and during the hearing of one of these at Wellington, in February of this year, Mr. Justice Sim said that, in any case, before employing a non-unionist, it was the duty of an employer who was bound by an award which provided for preference, to make reasonable inquiries as to whether a unionist was available. This clause is a very difficult one to administer, and it may be noted that in some recent awards—for instance, the Wellington Grocers'—there are fresh provisions which will somewhat simplify matters. The award provides for preference on the condition (amongst others) that any member whose name is on the employment-book shall be willing and ready to accept the employment offered within twenty-four hours after notification has been given to the Labour Department by the employer that he requires such worker.