

FACTORIES ACT.

The Act has worked smoothly during the year. The class of buildings now in use, the provisions for the health and comfort of the employees, the attention to sanitary requirements, the protection against accidents, and the conditions altogether show a marked advance in comparison with previous years. I find that public opinion is very decided on such matters, and employers are, generally speaking, quite willing to act upon any suggestions for improvement.

Up to this year the old prevailing sanitary accommodation had not been satisfactory, but with the near completion of the new drainage system, and sewerage connections being compulsory, this defect has now almost disappeared.

It has come under my notice that where new premises are erected it often occurs that, upon inspection, considerable alterations have to be effected before registration can be granted, and extra expense is thus occasioned to the occupier, which would not have been incurred had the plans of the buildings been first submitted to the Department. I consider that where any building is to be erected for factory purposes, in the interest of the factory-occupiers themselves, it should be made essential to do this. At present it is only necessary that the plans receive the approval of the local authority, and the requirements of the Factories Act are sometimes overlooked until afterwards, with the result as above stated.

During the year 1,179 factories have been registered in Dunedin (including 30 workrooms hitherto registered in the Mosgiel district). This return shows a decrease of 22 on last year's number, and is accounted for by the fact that a number of small businesses have gone out of existence, the employers obtaining work in the larger factories. The number of workers, including employers, engaged was 10,894, as against a total of 10,541 in the previous year: 7,346 were males and 3,548 females, as against 7,181 males and 3,360 females employed in the previous year.

Certificates of Fitness to work in Factories.—With regard to certificates of fitness to young persons, I consider that, in order to avoid hardship in some cases, more discretionary powers should be given to Inspectors. It often occurs that, owing to some cause not always the fault of the parents, the young person has not passed Standard IV, and when he is over fourteen or fifteen there can be no compulsion to make him remain at school any longer; and in some cases there would be no possibility of his reaching that standard if he were to remain till he became sixteen years of age. On the other hand, the opposite sometimes obtains. The young person reaches the school-limit of proficiency before he is fourteen. What he lacks in years is made up in the acumen his advanced education has provided him with. In such cases as these I think the Inspector should have some power to discriminate and act.

Five hundred and eighty certificates of fitness have been issued, 277 to boys and 303 to girls (fourteen to sixteen years of age). 584 permits were issued in the previous year; a reduction of four is thus shown this year.

Overtime.—During the year 3,656 persons were recorded as working 200,663 hours overtime. 1,650 male workers above sixteen years of age worked 133,795 hours, whilst 2,006 women of all ages and boys under sixteen years worked 66,868 hours overtime. Compared with last year, a reduction of 231 is shown in the number of male workers over sixteen years, and a decrease of 45,573 hours in the time worked. In respect to women and boys, there is an increase of 234, who worked 5,453 more hours in this year.

Accidents reported show an increase in number, there being 153 this year, against 121 in the previous year. Fortunately none were fatal, and very few indeed were more than slight. Most of them were caused by misadventure and negligence on the part of the workers. In all cases the machines or saws were shown to be safeguarded as far as was possible. The following are those with serious results. A girl, when shortening a belt of a sewing-machine, had her right hand caught and the forefinger pulled out; a man was kept to do this work, and the girl had no business to touch the belt. A lad playing with a cutting-machine in a confectionery-factory pressed the lever, and guillotined the index finger of his left hand. At a shaping-machine a man lost the fourth finger and part of two others by his hand slipping and coming under the knife. A man employed on a fleshing-machine had his right thumb drawn in, and so badly injured as to require amputation.

Prosecutions during the year were few: 10 cases in all were sent to Court; convictions were obtained in 5 cases, 2 cases were dismissed, and 3 withdrawn.

The inspection of factories in the district throughout the year has been very complete, and the few cases for prosecutions confirm what I have previously said respecting the general willingness of occupiers to give a ready compliance with the provisions of the Act.

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

During the year the Act has operated with almost entire absence of friction.

There is still no compulsion under the Act for shopkeepers to keep a record of wages paid to employees. The provisions in the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act directing all shopkeepers and other parties to awards to keep a wages record is a necessary step. It would, however, be better if the Shops and Offices Act made provision compelling all shopkeepers to keep the same.

For the forthcoming municipal election a vigorous attempt is being made under the new provisions giving the electors the power to fix the half-holiday for shops to induce them to favour Saturday as the day of the universal half-holiday.* A certain amount of difficulty in adopting a general Saturday half-holiday is due to the custom of paying wages on Saturday at midday, and the workers, both single

* The result of the election was against Saturday, and to retain the day appointed by the city and borough councillors.