

and married, would thus suffer some inconvenience from Saturday closing. In shops and offices the pay-day varies; but mechanics and labourers are nearly all paid on Saturday. It seems to me that if employers could be induced to pay on some earlier day in the week the Saturday half-holiday would come naturally.

For the year the number of shops in the district was 1,247, employing 1,473 males and 649 females, there being also engaged 1,276 employers; 272 persons worked 3,801 hours overtime, as against 165 persons and 2,549 hours overtime in the previous year—a very considerable increase.

There were during the year 20 prosecutions under the Act, which resulted in 16 convictions and 4 dismissals.

There are still well-founded complaints of long hours in offices and warehouses. The employees in some cases, however, profess that they are satisfied with the concession they are given by way of annual leave on pay, and payment of wages during sickness. I think that these compensations still leave a balance on the wrong side of some of the employees' ledgers.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

No breaches of the Act were reported during the year, and there is reason to believe that the abuses which the Act was designed to suppress have disappeared. The establishment of the Women's Employment Branch of the Department no doubt accounts for the number of registry-offices this year being 13 as compared with 20 registered last year.

INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION ACT.

There have not been many serious difficulties in the administration of this Act. The feeling between the employers and employed seems generally to be of a cordial character, and this will probably increase now that the new principle of conciliation under the amendment of last year has been introduced. This state of affairs has led to most of the disputes that have arisen for some months being settled by industrial agreements drawn up by the parties coming together. Credit for this is mainly due to the co-operation between the various officers of the unions and the Employers' Association. The conciliatory spirit shown in the settlement of disputes has also naturally minimised the number of breaches occurring, and in consequence there has been very little friction in the duties of enforcing the Act.

There were 279 complaints of breaches of awards during the year, of which 69 were settled out of Court by the Department, and a sum of £314 2s. was recovered in the settlement thereof. In 133 cases it was found that no breach had occurred, and the remainder were disposed of by the Court (see tables at end).

The new provision for the hearing of enforcement cases by Magistrates has facilitated our work considerably, as no unnecessary delay need now occur in waiting for the next sitting of the Arbitration Court, and, as the amendment allows for reference direct to the latter Court in any important cases, there should be ample provisions for the proper hearing of all cases.

One salient feature which I consider is wrong is that the onus of collecting penalties still rests on the Department. It would, I submit, be more satisfactory if the cases were all dealt with and fines made recoverable under the Justices of the Peace Act. The Court officials have all the facilities for the collection of penalties, while we have no such special facilities.

Another matter in connection with awards which requires consideration is that of the law governing apprentices. The Master and Apprentice Act was passed in 1865, and requires bringing into line with present-day conditions. However, the provision now made in most awards making the teaching of an apprentice the duty of the employer, and the duty of the apprentice to fulfil his term (both duties being enforceable under the award), is undoubtedly a workable one.

The main difficulties in respect to enforcement in the district have occurred in connection with the coal-mining industry. In the first part of the year conditions were very unsettled. A strike of some 43 truckers took place in one of the mines, but was very short-lived, lasting but two days. It would be an advantage if a much clearer and more uniform definition could be adopted throughout the various mines as to what is a heading, level, bord, &c. While there is no basis for computing hewing-rates, the trouble will always be brewing. I am pleased to say, however, that I believe there is now a better understanding between the parties than has existed for some time.

CONCLUSION.

I must state that the very favourable report of conditions generally existing here under the various Acts and awards has, of course, resulted in a great measure from the very tactful administration of my predecessor, Mr. P. Hally, and his departure from this district has been regretted by all parties with whom he had dealings.

In conclusion, I have to thank the officers of the staff for the able manner in which they have carried out their duties.

The Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.

I have, &c.,
E. LE CREN,
Inspector in Charge.