

I think the time is ripe for general closing-hours of all shops, except in a few trades, to be fixed. This opinion is voiced by a great number of shopkeepers, and is confirmed by the number of "requisitions" fixing closing-hours in the respective trades in force under section 25, which are got up by the shopkeepers themselves. The enforcement of the provisions as to closing and ceasing work has been very complete during the year, systematic inspection having been made on each closing-day and in the evening of every working-day in the week.

I would suggest that provision should be made to specifically class laundry receiving-depots, dyers', tailors', and boot-repairers' premises as shops, as in my opinion the present interpretation of a shop does not include them.

There is no provision such as in the Factories Act for insuring proper means for escape in case of fire in shops. I submit this should be remedied by inserting a clause similar to that in the Factories Act.

I find that the close inspection made in respect to the provisions of the Act generally has tended to make shopkeepers more fully recognize their responsibilities. This is manifested by there being only 17 prosecutions during the year. Conviction was obtained in each instance, but no case calls for any special comment.

A number of minor cases were settled without recourse to Court, and a sum of £7 19s. 1d. was recovered and paid to the respective payees.

Warrants for overtime were issued to 856 shop-assistants, who worked 16,887 hours' overtime during the year.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES.

During the year 4 original licenses were issued, and 6 renewed.

Inspection of all offices disclosed a full compliance with the laws. No complaints from any source reached me.

SHEARERS' AND AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS' ACCOMMODATION ACT.

Inspection was made of all shearing-sheds under the scope of the Act within a radius of twenty-five miles of the city. The report in every instance was favourable.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION ACT.

In respect to accidents in factories, advice was given to persons injured as to the benefits to which they were entitled under this Act. The Department's advice has also been sought by outside claimants. I again submit that no settlement should be effected without reference being first made to a Magistrate or an Inspector of Factories; also, that in no case should a worker have to bear the cost of any medical certificate he is asked by the employer or insurance company to produce.

I have, &c.,

E. LE CREN,

Inspector of Factories.

The Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.

SIR,—

21st April, 1911.

I beg to report on the administration of the various awards under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act in the city and suburbs of Wellington since my resuming charge of this work in June last, as follows:—

There have been no cases calling for special mention during the period under review different from those dealt with in previous years. A great deal of work has, however, been done under the Act, and a very large number of complaints of non-observance of the various awards have been made by union secretaries requiring a good deal of careful investigation. In many instances breaches were disclosed, but a considerable number of the complaints were found to be groundless. The offences committed show a large decrease on previous years, and the flagrant breaches, so conspicuous in years gone by, have now almost completely disappeared. In almost all cases it was found where breaches had taken place that they had been committed either through ignorance on the part of the employer or through carelessness.

There is now a greater tendency on the part of all concerned to endeavour to observe the terms of the awards. A few employers, however, still exist who attempt to "dodge" or defy the awards. I have found cases during the year where an employer has persuaded his employees to sign the wages-book for a wage equal to the award rate, where in fact the employees were receiving only a few shillings per week, and in some cases only their food and clothing. Such cases are difficult to prove, and it is usually after an employee leaves or falls out with his employer that the breaches come to light. In such cases both employer and worker should be severely dealt with.

The preference clause under the awards continues to give dissatisfaction to many employers, and many breaches of this clause have been committed. An employer is frequently too ready to take a man's word as to his being a member of the union, or else does not even bother to ask if he belongs to it. The mere fact of an employer asking a man if he belongs to a union, and receiving an affirmative answer, is not sufficient, and I have always advised employers, when engaging men, to ask for the membership tickets. If this were done fewer breaches would occur.

Some difficulty has been experienced under the Carpenters and Joiners' award in getting employers who have started business without any capital to pay their workers their wages at the required time. In several cases during the year I found that employers had started in business in this way, and were dependent on progress payments for their men's wages. Until such payments were forthcoming the men had to go without their pay. Prosecutions for this offence were taken during the year.