

similar goods to those sold by tobacconists. I am of the opinion that most shopkeepers would welcome compulsory closing at 6 p.m., with certain exemptions—viz., the exempted shops to be rigidly tied down to certain goods, with the proviso that if goods other than those specified were stocked occupiers should be compelled to close at the same hour as other shopkeepers selling the same classes of goods. If this course were adopted, it would to some extent stop the unfair competition which goes on at present.

I have visited all shops in the district and a large number of shops in the other towns of the province. I have paid special attention to the hours, wages, overtime, and holidays observed in the various shops, and also seating-accommodation for female assistants, fire-escapes, ventilation, and sanitation.

The conditions of employment, on the whole, are satisfactory, and the relationship between employers and employees has been most cordial. There have been no serious differences or wrongs requiring redress.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES.

There were 4 offices registered in this district. I have visited each of them several times during the year, and found them well conducted in every way. An investigation of the books has proved that the fees charged are strictly in accordance with the schedule. I have come in personal contact with a number of employees who have obtained positions through these offices, and upon inquiring from them I have found that they have all been treated fairly. I have received inquiries from a number of employers who were under the impression that they had been overcharged, but in all cases inquiry proved that they had been charged schedule rates.

There is an arrangement between keepers of offices in Wellington, Auckland, and elsewhere, and employers in this province, by which the train or boat fares of persons engaged through their offices is paid by the employer, on condition that the employee remains three months; if the employee does not remain three months the amount of the fare is deducted from their wages when they leave, and as they very seldom remain three months, these deductions are of frequent occurrence. A number of complaints has been made to me by employees under this head, and I must say, in fairness to employers, that in every case referred to me no deduction had been made. There are numerous cases, however, throughout the province where deductions from wages for fares have been made.

SCAFFOLDING INSPECTION ACT.

The provisions of this Act have been closely observed by the builders and contractors of this district. In all cases where necessary notices of intention to erect scaffolding have been sent to this office, and have been forwarded to the Inspector of Scaffolding.

HOTELS AND RESTAURANTS.

No difficulty has been experienced in administering the Shops and Offices Act relating to hotels and restaurants. Frequent visits of inspection have been paid by me to all hotels and restaurants in the district. Time and wages and holiday books are kept in all cases in accordance with the Act.

In my last report I referred to a question which is in constant dispute between employers in the hotel business, and that is the question of notice of termination of engagement. Some employers insist upon a week's notice. The matter is of considerable importance, and is in almost constant dispute between some employer and his or her employee.

INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION ACT.

Although the enforcement of the provisions of the Act necessitates a great deal of travelling for the purpose of inspection, the work in connection therewith is comparatively light. There are few awards or agreements in operation in this district, and I am pleased to say there have not been any serious differences in any of the trades under award or agreement. There has been a number of trivial irregularities due to carelessness or want of knowledge of the provisions of the particular award or agreement; in all such cases immediate compliance with the provisions of the awards or agreements has been made when the irregularities have been pointed out. No complaints have been made by employees working under award or agreement. The sum of £10 17s. 6d. arrears of wages has been received by employees, with the assistance of the Department.

SHEARERS' ACCOMMODATION ACT.

I visited a number of sheds during the shearing season, and found the accommodation and conditions of employment satisfactory in every way.

WORKERS' DWELLINGS ACT.

A great deal of interest has been manifested in this Act by the workers of the district. There is a large number of workers here anxious to avail themselves of the advantages of the Act, and there is great disappointment amongst them because of the inability of the Department to obtain land at a reasonable price.

CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, I have to record my appreciation of the kindness and consideration I have received from all with whom I have been brought into contact in carrying out my various duties.

I have, &c.,

HARRY WILLIS,

Inspector of Factories.

The Secretary of Labour and Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.