

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

Three hundred and ninety-nine shops—70 more than the previous year—have been registered within the borough. The number of employees was 1,123, being 330 over the past year. The wages paid to shop-assistants totalled slightly over £65,000.

In 19 shops 1,925 hours' overtime was worked by 158 assistants. This is a big increase upon the year before.

Shopkeepers generally have kept the necessary wages and time books, and have shown a desire to obey the law as to closing-hours. Warnings have had to be given in several cases, but very few have needed a second reminder.

In this note of commendation I should specially mention the hotels. As far as the labour laws are concerned, the hotelkeepers have all endeavoured to keep within the requirements of the Act, and have made frequent inquiries at this office so as to discover their position and what to do to prevent breaches.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

Four servants' registry offices are licensed at Palmerston North, against six for the previous year. Each has been satisfactorily conducted, and no complaints have been received concerning them. One office has only recently been registered. I have been able to ascertain the following statistics from the four licensed offices for the year just ended: Number of engagements, 2,368; number in which the worker was charged a fee, 2,155; number in which the employer was charged a fee, 88; amount of fees paid by workers, £452 7s. 6d.; amount of fees paid by employers, £10 6s.

Young People working in Shops.

A young person under sixteen has to obtain a permit to work in a factory, but not in a shop, yet the factory works less hours, and is by far the healthier of the two. Only a few Saturday evenings back I visited one of the largest shops in Palmerston North. It was a pouring wet night, and what with the humid atmosphere and the intense heat of the big lights the employees looked, as they said they felt, ready to drop. On Saturdays eleven hours are allowed for working. I have frequently been told of young girls being compelled to seek other employment—they cannot stand the strain. Again I urge the consideration of this matter in the interests of our young people.

PROSECUTIONS UNDER FACTORIES, SHOPS, INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION, AND OTHER ACTS, AND CASES SETTLED OUT OF COURT.

As has been my custom in regard to the observance of the provisions of the various Acts and awards affecting each particular business, my aim has been the prevention of breaches being committed. Innumerable warnings have been given both verbally and in writing, and only as a last resource has the aid of the Court been invoked. That the number of breaches committed has been less than last year is evidenced by the number of Court cases, and by the fact that only 21 registered letters of warning have been sent to law-breakers.

In a large number of cases employers were allowed to put themselves right by paying arrears of wages that were due, and £213 12s. 10d. was recovered in this way by this office and paid over to the workers concerned.

Quite a large number of complaints received were duly investigated, and being unsubstantiated no further action was taken.

Cases taken into Court: Under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, 24 cases were taken; 2 were dismissed, and 22 breaches were recorded, with £21 7s. penalties and costs. Under the Shops and Offices and Factories Acts 14 cases were taken into Court; 1 was dismissed, and 23 convictions were recorded, with £6 19s. fines and costs. Where more than one case was taken against the same defendant only one penalty was asked for, convictions only being recorded in the other cases.

One of the cases taken into Court is deserving of special mention. Proceedings were taken for having work done in an unregistered workroom (Factories Act). The Magistrate decided that, while the first part of the section of the Act dealing with textile material provided that "occupiers of factories" cannot have any work done in an unregistered workroom, the second part of the section is intended to extend this provision to shopkeepers who are not occupiers of factories, prohibits only complete garments (not merely material) from "being made up" in an unregistered factory, and dismissed the case. The article in question had been altered in an unregistered factory. Seeing that the sole object of the clause in the Act is to prevent sweating, and textile material (which is so subject to catching the germs of any disease) from being worked upon in insanitary places or amid unhealthy surroundings, if the Act has been correctly interpreted by the Magistrate, it requires, in the public interest, amending at the first opportunity. There is just as much risk in an article being impregnated with germs while being repaired or altered as there is while it is being "made up."

Generally, the industrial laws have been administered without friction, and every effort has been made not to harass the employers throughout the district both by the local police officers, who fill the position of local Inspectors, and by myself.

CONCLUSION.

During the year I have visited Ashhurst, Awahuri, Bull's, Feilding, Foxton, Glen Oroua, Kairanga, Kelvin Grove, Levin, Longburn, Marton, Moutoa, Otaki, Rongotea, Rangiotu, Rangi-tane, Shannon, Tiritea, Taikorea, Woodville, Whitanui, and Whakaronga. To the police officers of these places I tender my best thanks for the assistance they have at all times so cheerfully rendered, in most cases accompanying me on my visits to the various places requiring inspection.