

possible exception of the workshops and works staffs. Mr. Mason is of the opinion that even this exception should not be made, and accordingly does not subscribe to it. The Court of Arbitration for several years past has prescribed a forty-four-hours week for workers in trades in which the work is of a continuously strenuous nature, more particularly the skilled trades, and a forty-eight-hours week for other workers. Outside of the workshops and works staffs the Railway employees with whose conditions of work we are concerned come within the latter category.

We are further of the opinion that payment of overtime rates in respect of all time on duty in excess of eight hours in any day is unwarranted. In industries where the work is continuous over the twenty-four hours of the day, and where the nature of the business necessitates the shifts being of unequal duration, it is customary to fix a limit (usually ten hours) to the daily number of hours that may be worked, or to fix a span of hours (from eleven to fifteen) within which the daily number of hours must be worked, or to fix both a limit and a span. Overtime rates are payable only in respect of time worked in excess of the number of hours so fixed as the daily limit, or outside of the span of hours during which the day's work is to be performed. In the case of the Traffic and Stores staffs, it is unnecessary to fix a daily span of hours, for the existing regulations are sufficient for the purpose; and it appears to us that the fixing of a daily limit of ten hours is reasonable in view of the conditions of Railway work. The provision of a forty-eight-hours week, with overtime rates for all time worked in excess of ten hours in any day or of forty-eight hours in any week, safeguards the employee against being required to work without overtime-payment longer than an average of eight hours daily, and tends to restrict the maximum daily hours of work to a number approximating to that average. It may be mentioned, in passing, that in many industries there is no daily limit of hours, the provision of a weekly limit of forty-eight hours meeting all requirements. An exact eight-hours day is unworkable in a transport service such as the Railway service, and necessarily involves a largely increased wages-bill disguised as overtime. It may be taken as axiomatic that a fair and reasonable daily or weekly number of hours of work, ascertained by reference to the nature and conditions of the particular employment and by comparison with available standards, should be paid for at ordinary rates of wages, and time worked in excess of that number of hours should be paid for at overtime rates. The nature and conditions of the employment in the case with which we are dealing render it fair and reasonable that the day's work should average eight hours, and unreasonable and impracticable that it should be exactly eight hours. Hence overtime rates should be paid only in respect of time worked in excess of forty-eight hours weekly, which is equivalent to an average of eight hours on six days of the week. In order that the extreme daily number of hours should not unduly exceed the average, the provision of overtime rates after a maximum of ten hours has been worked on any day has been recommended for the Traffic and Stores staffs generally, with certain exceptions that have been specially referred to.

We have recommended the discontinuance of the payment of a special night rate. It is not customary to pay overtime rates to workers outside the Railway service for shift-work that has necessarily to be performed all round the clock. The wage fixed for these workers covers an allowance for the necessary conditions of their employment. We have, however, recommended an increase of the general overtime rate from rate and a quarter on 44/48ths of the schedule rates of pay to rate and a half on the full schedule rates of pay. This is in accordance with the usual practice prevailing outside the Railway service, and is a compensation to the men for the withdrawal of the night rate.

WAGES AND CONDITIONS GENERALLY.—We have had an opportunity of comparing the wages and conditions of the New Zealand Railways employees with those of the employees of the Australian Railways system, and are satisfied that the comparison is all in favour of New Zealand. A comparison of New Zealand Railways wages and conditions with those obtaining in industries in New Zealand in which similar classes of workers are employed is also in favour of the New Zealand Railways employee. No body of hourly or daily workers outside the Railway service possesses such advantages as payment for public holidays on which no work is done, annual leave on full pay, free passes, privilege tickets, free carriage of provisions to isolated stations, a liberal superannuation scheme, and, above all, continuity of employment and a guaranteed week's pay each week. All these advantages are enjoyed by the Railway workers, many of whom also have the benefit of cheap housing, while few workers outside the service have even one of these advantages. These all have a definite money value. Further, the actual money wages paid to Railway employees have been brought into conformity with the increased cost of living. The present minimum rate of 1s. 9³/₄d. per hour represents an increase of 61·2 per cent. over the minimum rate payable in 1914, and the value of improved conditions and other concessions granted since 1914 places the Railway worker on a better standard than in pre-war years. The weekly wage rates show a similar increase, for the present weekly hours are in no case longer than those worked in 1914. It was contended that the rates fixed by the Court of Arbitration were minimum rates, and that workers often received substantially higher rates, whereas the classified rates of Railway employees were standard rates. This is true, but an examination of the classified rates discloses that they are higher than the corresponding minimum rates of the Court of Arbitration, and are probably as high as, if not higher than, the general level of wages prevailing in industries governed by awards of the Court. The present building boom and the scarcity of tradesmen have raised carpenters' wages for the time being, at all events in the cities and some of the larger towns, to an unusually high level, but in the iron and leather trades there is much unemployment, shortened hours are being worked, and wages tend markedly towards the award minima. The classified rates of the Railway Department, however, are framed without regard to boom or slump conditions prevailing outside the service, and afford a fair reward for the work performed. For these reasons and having regard to improved conditions granted since 1914, we have found ourselves unable to