

would-be evaders, and when conciliation and remonstrance fail there is no remedy but to put the law in action. This course I was forced to adopt in such cases. As the local Bench interpreted the reading of some of the clauses contrary to what was the departmental idea, and, I think, spirit of the Act, this caused some disorganization, and, I am led to believe, encouraged opponents. But, as I have brought this under your notice in a private memorandum, I trust you will endeavour to get the wording put in such clear unison with the spirit that there can be no possible doubt. The amended Act will, I trust, be so worded as to enable an Inspector and employer to fight out a case without drawing in the unlucky employés. As it stands at present the only course for proving or disproving certain charges is by putting employés in the witness-box—a very risky place for them if called upon to give evidence against a certain class of employers. Indeed, I am of opinion that there might be instances where the alternative would be perjury or loss of situation, and, with such a prospect, it is hard on the unoffending boy or girl so placed. I have often received the petition, "Please don't call on me; I will only get into trouble." To give ground for this belief it is known that girls have had to leave, or were dismissed as suspects; and I here wish to put it on record that when such cases were represented to disinterested employers they immediately gave the sufferers employment.

There is a surplus of girl-labour in this city at present, owing to the closing of the large manufactory already indicated, and there is no organization strong enough to protect them. Individually, girls are at the mercy of an employer who would be inclined to act tyrannically; and I fear the liberty of the subject is not at all times considered, as, in some instances, it would go hard with a girl if it were known that she belonged to a union, or was seen speaking to the Inspector.

My reason for introducing this into my report is to show you the necessity for giving the Inspector more power, especially in finding out breaches of the Act, such as non-payment for statutory holidays, and also to let you see the reign of terror that would be in force if those girls were unprotected. I will quote an employer's estimate of his employés, and you may take it for granted he does not stand alone. He said, "I just look on them as I do on a bag of potatoes—viz., the market value."

SHOP AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS.

On this Act I can only say, in the words of my last report, it is giving satisfaction to none. The difficulty of an Inspector enforcing the half-holiday is the same as that referred to *re* a clause of the Factory Act. It can only be done by placing the boy or girl so deprived in the witness-box to give evidence against his or her employer; but, as I understand an Act is framed for embracing compulsory closing on the half-holiday, it will obviate this if it becomes law. I trust the proposed Act will be complete, and close all shops, large and small. I fail to see where the injury would come in if all were closed alike; and I do not think it would be fair to close the shop that employed an assistant, and allow a rival who runs on family lines to keep open. In the framing of this Bill I would draw particular attention to the necessity of having shops properly ventilated.

There is another, and what I consider a serious, wrong and injury perpetrated on employés in this city—namely, certain employers curtailing the hour for dinner. In the case of girls working in a stuffy and overcrowded shop on a hot summer day, I consider it cruel, and a very certain way to injure health and strength, to prevent them getting, during the day, a breath of fresh air. I am certainly not a believer in the theory I heard advanced against this—viz., if girls had a half-hour they would walk about and get tired, and be unfitted for afternoon work. I hope the Act will provide for an hour at dinner. I am convinced that this clause is much required, as I am aware of instances in which girls were not allowed out from opening till closing.

The shortest hours are on ordinary days, from 9 am. till 6 p.m., on Saturdays and eve of holidays extending to very late hours. Girls are threatened with dismissal on the first instance they are seen making use of the seats ordered by the Act. I could give a great many illustrations to show the urgent necessity for legislation in this matter, but I trust the above will suffice.

I have, &c.,

H. FERGUSON, Inspector.

E. Tregear, Esq., Secretary, Labour Department, Wellington.

GISBORNE.

SIR,—

Gisborne, 2nd May, 1894.

During the past year, owing to the gradual advance of settlement in the Cook and Waiapu Counties, it is satisfactory to report that steady employment has been found for a large number of men, principally at roadwork and bushfelling, at fairly remunerative rates of wages. It cannot, however, be denied that the rates prevailing in previous years have been considerably reduced, especially in regard to work at bushfelling. This arises in a great measure from the increased competition by reason of the large influx of such workers, attracted here by the favourable reports emanating partly from those employed in preceding years, from notices in the Press, and to inducements held out by employers, which have in many cases not been realised. It is stated that the amount of clearing this season will be restricted. If that be so, the now resident labourers would be sufficient to undertake any work of this description offering. It may be assumed, on the other hand, that advantage will be taken of the lower rates and comparative abundance of labour to proceed with clearing operations on a more extensive scale than that anticipated.

The principal roadworks undertaken have been under the control of the local bodies, the expenditure thereon having chiefly been from loans under "The Government Loans to Local Bodies Act, 1886." In some instances, also, the expenditure of parliamentary grants for roads has been placed under the supervision and control of the county authorities. These works have