

That the small shops hitherto claiming eccentric half-holidays on account of their employing no paid assistants should be brought into line with the other shops, and made to close on the general half-holiday. The irritation and confusion caused by the irregular opening of these small shops, both to competing tradespeople and the Inspectors, is not compensated for by the doubtful advantage of the small shopkeepers being allowed to choose their own day for closing.

That instead of ten days in each month being allowed in offices for overtime this should be altered to one day in each week.

#### SERVANTS' REGISTRY-OFFICES.

This Act is working exceedingly well, and has had the effect not only of protecting a class of people formerly much imposed on, but also of raising the character of the offices so that only the more reputable and high-class establishments have continued to exist. The Inspectors' conference recommended that a duplicate receipt-book be kept by the registry-office keeper, and that all fees and charges, &c., be entered both in the block and in the receipt given to client, the block to be signed by client.

#### THE INDUSTRIAL CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION ACTS.

Of these Acts full advantage has been taken during the year, and a very large number of disputes has been settled by the aid of these beneficent measures. Those persons who are opposed to the principle of the Acts have, of course, much to say in their disfavour. The principal argument used in this direction is that the Acts seem to stir up rather than settle strife by enabling every petty misunderstanding to be dragged into the full light of day and become serious; that the Boards and Court foment enmity between employer and employed by binding employers under harassing restrictions and wasting the time of both parties in litigious proceedings. It must be remembered, however, that, small as some of the issues appear to outsiders, they may be mere germs of mischief that, if not eradicated, might grow to gigantic proportions if undisturbed. The disturbance of the industrial equilibrium caused by even one continued strike is so extensive and its scope so far-reaching that it is well worth almost any trouble and expense to prevent such trouble at its commencement. The cost and difficulty of settling by legal or friendly procedure a dozen small disputes is cheaply purchased if the greater calamity attending a single strike be taken into account.

A full report of all the cases which have occupied the Conciliation Boards and the Arbitration Court during the year will be found printed in full herewith, except in the case of one or two lengthy disputes already set out in detail in the "Journal of the Department of Labour."

There are certain parts of the Acts which seem to require amendment, and suggestions have been made by those interested in perfecting the measures that well deserve consideration. One of these is that the members of the Arbitration Court should be appointed by the direct vote of industrial unions, as the necessity of forming these unions into industrial associations presses heavily upon the time and organizing-power of the unions themselves, and at present the result is that they are left without representation. On the other hand, it is proposed that the present system be retained, on the ground that the suffrage is thus restrained to the most intelligent among the members of industrial unions.

Another proposal is that the decision of Conciliation Boards should be made binding if the parties to the suit agree to the Board's recommendation. Much time is now wasted by cases being heard before the Board when it is the expressed intention of the litigants to carry such cases on to the Court whatever the recommendation of the Board may be. This arises from the fact that the Board has not the power to bind the parties to any particular course of action, and therefore the decision of the higher Court, which has the effect of law, must be invoked. Whether it is desirable to destroy the principle of conciliation by giving the Board the powers of a tribunal is questionable, but it would certainly be an immense gain from the point of view of economy, and would remove a feeling of irritation from the minds of members of Boards who at present sometimes consider their time needlessly wasted.

The objection made that petty grievances are magnified and labour disputes aggravated in order that Boards may be kept sitting would probably be met if the fees and travelling-expenses of members of the Board should (like the expenses of witnesses) be charged to the disputing parties as costs. The trade-unions would certainly be unlikely to bring petty disputes forward if the heavy expenses of calling the Board together might fall upon them; but, on the other hand, great care must be taken lest the usefulness of the Acts be crippled by the fear of extreme expense supervening. In such cases justice becomes a luxury only to be enjoyed by the rich, and the present merit of the Act—viz., that it reaches down to remove even the tiniest industrial irritant—would be lost. It is better that the country should bear the slight expense attending the sitting of Boards than that one citizen should have to say, "I am oppressed and unjustly treated, but am not rich enough to make my complaint reach the ears of those in power; I must suffer in silence." This latter argument also applies to the suggestions made that when there is an appeal made to the Court from the recommendation of the Board a sum of money should be lodged by the appellant to meet the costs of the Court. The reproach often used in the past concerning Courts of justice and the part played in them by the power of wealth should never be allowed to be cast upon the Court of Arbitration, and although perhaps it may be idealistic to hope that one day justice may be dispensed free of charge to all, still in this matter the country may draw near the ideal by taking on itself the burdens of its weaker members at a cost infinitesimal when divided among all the units of its population, and it will be repaid by the steadiness with which the general level of industrial life will be sustained.