

I regret to state that the overtime evil is still on the increase. Unfortunately, the Inspectors of Factories, until a certain legal limit is reached, have no power to refuse permits to work overtime unless they are convinced that the individual health of some person named in the application will be endangered by the permit. In the four chief towns the overtime figures stand thus: In Auckland, 811 persons worked 14,302 hours; in Wellington, 1,362 persons worked 39,689 hours; in Christchurch, 1,743 persons worked 42,154 hours; and in Dunedin, 1,174 persons worked 42,024 hours: making a total of 5,099 persons working 138,169 hours. Included in the above figures are those for overtime worked on half-holidays—viz.: In Auckland, 190 persons worked 614 hours; in Wellington, 240 persons worked 1,003 hours; in Christchurch, 218 persons worked 585 hours; and in Dunedin, 349 persons worked 1,825 hours: making a total of 997 persons working 4,027 hours. The detailed account of the way the overtime was distributed among various trades is to be found in a separate table of this report.

The evil of overtime-work lies in two directions—first, the undue strain on those already in employment; and second, in the non-employment of those out of work. It happens, however, that under the present prosperous circumstances of the colony the latter objection has little application, for in several trades overtime has been worked only because there was no outside labour to be procured. Nevertheless, the general public should regard as a moral obligation an effort to better regulate their pressures of demand. It is more in consequence of the spasmodic and irregular nature of trade requirements that overtime-work exists than owing to any other cause. At certain seasons there is intense pressure on dressmaking and kindred establishments, with corresponding slackness of work in the rests between these seasons. Those who wish the working-classes well would promote that wish by endeavouring to persuade people to spread their orders over a larger part of the year. It is only a silly caprice or a senseless following one another like sheep which makes the majority rush at the same moment to place orders for goods which could be as well supplied a month or two before or after.

There have been few prosecutions under the Factories Act during the past year, and there appears to be a general wish on the part of employers to comply with the provisions of the Act. Any friction that has arisen has been caused almost invariably by some one misunderstanding the provisions of the statute. The enactments of "The Factories Act, 1894," with its amending Act of 1896, are confused with the provisions of "The Shops and Shop-assistants Act, 1894," with its amending Acts of 1895 and 1896. It is far from easy for an employer who has perhaps both a shop and a factory to comprehend what seems to him the conflicting directions of the several Acts, and I respectfully urge the passing of a Bill consolidating these Factories and Shops Acts into some one comprehensible measure.

I have pleasure in recording that in many districts there has been a distinct advance in the rates of wages of young workers.

I beg to make the following suggestions as to alterations necessary for rendering the Factories Act more effective. Some of these have been recommended in former reports, and have been indorsed by general consent of labour Inspectors and trade-union conferences: (1.) Except in jam-factories and woollen-mills, no woman or girl shall be employed for more than forty-five hours per week—i.e., for eight hours on five days, and five hours on the half-holiday. This clause was passed by both Houses in the Bill of last session, which was finally rejected; but the Bill would be better still if only four hours were worked on Saturday, as this would really give the workers the afternoon. (2.) That an Inspector should not have to prove "wilful" obstruction in the performance of his duty, as it is almost impossible to establish the wilfulness. (3.) That before a factory is built plans of the projected building be submitted to the Inspector. (4.) That all accidents in factories should be reported, and not merely those pertaining to particular branches of work. (5.) That all persons in charge of steam-boilers, &c., should hold a certificate of competency from the Inspector of Machinery. Now the lives of hundreds of workpeople are in daily jeopardy through the absence of any qualification on the part of men in charge of boilers. (6.) That there should be compulsory half-holiday for all workers on Saturdays, and adult men should share all the benefits of the Act as women and youths now do. (7.) That there should be power with Inspectors to compel people whose premises adjoin factories to keep their yards, outbuildings, &c., in a sanitary state. At present it is useless to insist that a factory should be kept clean and the ventilation good if every open window or door allows air to enter which has gathered poison-germs from putrid matter in neighbouring premises. (8.) That girls and women should not be allowed to work continuously in any room below the street-level. (9.) That Chinese should either be prohibited from keeping laundries, or have to observe the same hours as women workers. It is unfair that one of the most hardworked and poorly paid classes of women should be run out of honest employment by Asiatics. Our women have to keep within certain working-hours, while the Chinese man is practically free to work the twenty-four. If anything is done in this matter it is necessary to consider a Chinese laundry where only one is employed (and that the occupier) as a factory, as it is the solitary laundryman who is the stumbling-block in this branch of trade. (10.) That no overtime permit be granted by an Inspector to any girl under sixteen years of age. When a growing girl has performed eight hours monotonous work (perhaps standing all the time) she has done quite enough to try her health and strength, and is better at home than returning late at night, tired and hungry, through the streets of a town. (11.) That no person of either sex should be allowed to work in factories or shops beyond stated hours without a minimum overtime wage. Men at present have the economic advantage of being able to work any hours they like, a thing women cannot do, and the women suffer in competition therefor. The advantage, however, is only an apparent one to the male worker, for the employer's "request" for him to stay several hours in the evening has to be acceded to at cost of all hours of rest and recreation to the employé. If business is so pressing and so profitable (for it would not be undertaken without profit) that the assistants or work-