

a minimum wage of 6d. per hour, as in factories. This would prevent wanton waste of a shop-assistants' time. If there is such pressure of business that the shop must be kept open there must be profit enough to pay people for doing the work. An Early Closing Bill similar to that lately adopted in Australia would be of benefit to bring shops not employing assistants into line with the others, and so prevent an unfair advantage over the man enterprising enough to employ others in his business.

In one part of New Zealand a bad practice has crept in of evading the hours to which women and girls are limited to serving in shops by working them in alternate gangs, as "watches" are formed on board of a ship. One party of girls goes on at 8 a.m. and works till 11, returns at 1 p.m. and works till 5, returns at 7 and works till 9 p.m. Another party of girls comes on in the same shop at 10 and works till 1 p.m., returns at 3 and works till 7, returns at 9 and works till 11. None of the girls work more than the legal nine hours and a half, but these are dragged out and extended beyond anything contemplated in the Shops and Shop-assistants Act. There is no possible private time under the system for the recreation and relaxation of the assistant, nor should women and girls be exposed to the dangers of returning home late at night through the temptations and annoyances of a city. A simple provision like that in the Factory Act whereby women and girls are only allowed to be employed between the hours of 7.45 in the morning and 6 o'clock in the afternoon would meet the case.

There should be some clause in the Bill defining that restaurants and refreshment-rooms of any kind are shops subject to the provisions of the Act; also, that a woman Inspector should have power to visit bedroom-accommodation provided for assistants in these establishments, and, if necessary, see that improvements are made. At present there is reason to believe that some of the sleeping-rooms are dirty dens unfit for human occupation.

In regard to offices, many complaints are made by clerks, and by storemen in warehouses, as to the hours of overtime extracted from them without any remuneration. To give a day's pay and insist on two days' work for it appears to be a time-honoured institution. Even Sundays are swallowed up in some mercantile offices, or the books have to be taken home. I see no remedy except a similar one to the provision in the Factory Act (section 55) which allows no overtime without payment, nor unless the written permit of the Inspector is hung up in the workroom, with the names of those to whom the permit is allowed written thereon. It is impossible in any other way to know whether the hours granted by law to such offices for the purpose of balances, &c., are not being exceeded. Such a course may seem humiliating to managers of these offices, but they bring this kind of legislation on themselves by provocation of an extreme kind, and by raising public sentiment against their insensibility to the needs of others.

EMPLOYMENT OF BOYS OR GIRLS WITHOUT PAYMENT PREVENTION ACT.

This law, passed last session, has been carried out without friction. In most places the employers at once placed the youngsters on the new footing as to wages. Only in one locality in the colony were a few young persons discharged, and these were very soon reinstated. The measure should, however, be widened so as to apply to shops. An errand-boy or young shop-assistant should receive some small wage as much as if he were a factory-hand.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY AND SHEARERS' ACCOMMODATION.

Both these Acts have worked well during the year, and do not call for special remark except that in the case of the latter the accommodation of agricultural labourers should be included. If a temporary hand, stopping a few weeks, needs a decent sleeping-place, far more does one who stays in one situation for a long time require a cleanly and reasonably comfortable abode.

THE STATE FARM.

A description of the present position of the State farm at Levin will be found in the report of Mr. Mackay, Chief Clerk and Inspector of Factories.

EMPLOYERS' LIABILITY ACT.

There is strong necessity for an amendment of the above Act should the Workmen's Compensation Bill not become law this session. Several complaints have reached me that persons who should receive compensation under the Employers' Liability Act are tricked by being induced to delay sending in the notice required within six weeks of time of injury. Many of the people needing the compensation are not only weak after injury but are ignorant of business, and are easily put off and duped from day to day until the sixth week is past, and the employer (or his insurance agent) snaps his fingers at the sufferer.

Referring to the last paragraph, I would point out that the Accident Insurance Company, checked in extracting premiums from the workmen to cover employers' liability, now accept premiums from the employer himself in order to escape the consequences of actions and omissions that the Employers' Liability Act was passed to check. It is idle to say that a man shall pay compensation if his carelessness or parsimony has caused the death or injury of one of his workmen, when he is allowed to pass over this liability to a company, and goes his own reckless way unchecked.

Therefore it is necessary, in my opinion, that the Employers' Liability Act should be amended in these two directions—viz., that of extending the time of notice after accident, and that it should be illegal to contract out of liability for accident caused by the neglect or action of the employer.

EDWARD TREGGAR.