

useless. The clause might as well be cut out of the Bill altogether. It has no force—no influence whatever—in view of the definition of the term “occupier.” What, then, will be the result? If you force us to recognise Saturday as the day for the half-holiday it will mean that a great deal of the business now done on Saturday afternoon will be distributed over the other days in the week. That we admit; but it will tend to a great deal of late shopping on other nights. That will bring us back to the state we were in fifteen or twenty years ago when we had universal late shopping. Surely that is not desirable. The shopkeepers are not anxious to go back to that state of things. Would it not be far better to give opportunities to shopkeepers and their assistants to attend lectures and make use of other educational facilities placed at their disposal at a heavy expense to the country? Why should we not have the opportunity, for instance, of going to the House of Representatives and viewing the flower of the intelligence of this colony assembled there? Why should we not have the opportunity of listening to the flow of eloquence that goes on and on, like the river, but which, unfortunately, troubles us a great deal? However, gentlemen, I hope that you will consider the requirements of the workers in this case, and that legislation will not be brought in hurriedly that will place the workers of the colony at a disadvantage. As I have said before, Mr. Kirkcaldie represents his own class of customers; we represent the workers. It is not, I apprehend, your desire to legislate for the shopkeeper, or even for the assistant; but it is your desire to legislate for the great majority of the people. If that is your desire, gentlemen, I maintain that you cannot possibly alter this particular day without doing an injustice to the great majority of the people whom we are here to represent. That is all I have to say, gentlemen.

JAMES GODBER examined. (No. 3.)

*Mr. Godber:* Mr. Chairman and gentlemen,—Your time is short. The gentlemen who have preceded me have well explained the views of the deputation. I have been requested to attend this conference on behalf of the small traders. The small traders, sir, look with alarm at the proposal contained in the Bill to make the Saturday half-holiday compulsory. I care not for the large people. They can regulate their trade to suit its requirements. But with the struggling small traders, if you take their Saturday business away from them, it, in nine cases out of ten, means ruin. I say that advisedly. Mr. McLeod has spoken of the facilities that the working-men require in order to obtain their commodities after their work is over; and the small traders are unanimous in this city—and I believe they are the same in other cities—in their conviction that if you compel them to close on Saturday afternoon instead of another afternoon in the middle of the week their trade will go down so low that they will not be able to continue business. The great majority of the people in this city do not wish the day to be altered. For years now Wednesday has been our closing-day, and it has answered admirably. Some time ago, when this was a burning question in the city, petitions were got up both for and against the Wednesday half-holiday. I have here in my hand a petition that contains nearly twenty thousand signatures in favour of the Wednesday half-holiday. That petition was submitted to the City Council on that occasion.

2. *Mr. Aitken.*] Wednesday in preference to Saturday?—Yes. There was a counter-petition in opposition to this, but the names in this petition are four to one to those contained in the other; and if necessary we could duplicate that, and so increase the numbers very largely.

3. *Mr. Alison.*] When was the petition got up?—About four or five years ago. I am informed that the names in the petition in favour of Wednesday are nearly four to one in the other. I could not get the numbers at the hurried notice, but the secretary of the committee which got the petition up is here, and will indorse what I say—that for every signature in favour of Saturday there were about four in favour of Wednesday. That is correct, is it not, Mr. Bush?

*Mr. Bush:* Yes.

*Mr. Godber:* Then, sir, Wednesday is a success, and, such being the case, why interfere with it? Why should we disorganize trade? Why should we put burdens upon people that they cannot bear? If Saturday is a favourable afternoon for the holiday, how is it that it is not freely accepted through the whole of the colony? I do not know of one—if there is one it is only one—part of the colony that observes the Saturday half-holiday. I am not going to say anything about Christchurch, as representatives from there are here now and can speak for themselves; but I will mention Napier, which was compulsory. There, and at other places, though not compulsory, it has been tried—in a perfunctory manner truly—but it has not been a success. If you go further and go over to the Australian Colonies, you will find that Wednesday is the day for the half-holiday in Sydney, and it answers admirably. I am informed by our present Town Clerk, who was acting in that capacity in Sydney, that the Wednesday half-holiday there is a great success, and they would not dream of altering it for anything like a Saturday half-holiday. Melbourne is in the same position. I think, without further taking up the time of the Committee, that the trend of this Bill—to make the Saturday half-holiday compulsory—would be ruinous, and would disorganize trade in the city.

THOMAS WARDELL examined. (No. 4.)

*Mr. Wardell:* Mr. Chairman and gentlemen,—There is just one point that I would wish to draw the Committee's attention to. The question of overtime (clause 3) has been touched upon by Mr. Allan. I think we have seen the result of a meeting recently held in Wellington: that the assistants themselves are very much afraid that if this is made law it will be detrimental to their interests. I would also draw attention to subsection (2), where it is proposed to make it necessary in order to work overtime to get a permit from the Factory Inspector. Unless I am greatly mistaken this is a new proposal. At present we have to get permission from the Factory Inspector for youths under eighteen to work late hours. But we are not under the same necessity to get