

dodged in every direction. I think the exempted shops should have a special day for closing, say Wednesday or Thursday, or whatever day you like, but let it be one fixed day. I just make this suggestion for the consideration of the Committee.

When the deputation from the hairdressers and tobacconists waited upon the Committee it was stated that hotels sold cigars and tobacco when the tobacconists' shops were closed. Perhaps some do. It is a very debatable question, and I hardly know how to enter upon it. There are a good many restrictions on hotels at present, and it seems to me it would be rather hard on them to prevent them selling cigars on the half-holiday, because those who could not get them there would be able to get them at clubs. At the same time it must be remembered that tobacconists have petitioned Ministers that they may be subjected to a heavy tax in the shape of a license fee in order to protect themselves from the unfair competition which now goes on.

Section 12 provides for a half-holiday for assistants in hotels. There should be a proper time-table supplied to the Inspector, otherwise it would be impossible for any Inspector to get the run of the days on which assistants got their half-holiday. I think the hotelkeeper should give notice to the Inspector of the day on which So-and-so gets his half-holiday. The provision of subsection (2) of section 8 in the Bill is, "The half-holiday to which a shop-assistant is entitled under this section may be on such working-day as, in the case of each individual shop-assistant, the occupier thinks fit." I would add to the provision that notice of such holidays must be communicated to the Inspector, together with a proper time-table, and that there shall be no change of that time-table unless it has been notified beforehand to the Inspector.

Section 14 provides that on the requisition of three-fifths of all the shops in any borough the shops shall be closed at a certain hour. I want to put a very important suggestion before the Committee. I want to turn that section right round, and to provide that all shops shall close at a certain hour unless three-fifths of the shopkeepers ask that it shall not be so. I think that would be fairer, and the shopkeepers would have no difficulty in working it if they desired another hour for closing.

Section 16 defines office hours. Mr. Wedde, one of the deputation from lawyers' clerks who waited upon the Committee, said that some commercial offices opened before 9 o'clock in the morning, so as to get overtime worked early. I think there should be an hour fixed for offices to open in the morning, with, of course, a good margin in respect to the hours of working during the day.

Section 26 deals with the employment of assistants after the prescribed time. I think that if the provisions of section 3 with regard to overtime are properly carried out there will be no necessity for this section.

My last suggestion is that a clause is wanted in the Bill guarding the present awards of the Arbitration Court in respect to the half-holiday if it be made Saturday. There have been a good many awards for carters, grocers' assistants, &c., and I would suggest that hours, holidays, &c., should be maintained during the periods for which they have been given, and then they would fall into a general Saturday half-holiday as the different awards expired.

FRIDAY, 25th SEPTEMBER, 1903.

Mr. F. W. LANG examined. (No. 39.)

*Mr. Lang:* I am member of the House of Representatives for the Waikato District. The reason for my appearing before the Committee to-day is that I have been asked by my constituents to give evidence in relation to the Shops and Offices Bill. In my district I may say that the people are unanimously against a compulsory Saturday half-holiday. In every portion of the district they have chosen some other day than Saturday for the half-holiday, with the exception of the Cambridge Borough, which for a short time adopted the Saturday half-holiday, and then they found that they were obliged to go back to some other day—Wednesday or Thursday. That is pretty well all the evidence I have to give. I have had a great many communications from people in different parts of the district opposing the compulsory Saturday half-holiday, while on the other hand I have not received one communication in favour of it. The people there generally choose either Wednesday or Thursday for the half-holiday.

1. *Mr. Aitken.*] Do they wish to choose their own day, or would they prefer to have it fixed by statute?—They have not gone into that question in their communications to me. They are strongly opposed to the Saturday half-holiday, and that is the point they wish to emphasize. They do not care so much what other day may be chosen. The gist of the correspondence which I have received is that it is very inconvenient to the people in the district to have the holiday on Saturday.

2. *Mr. Laurensen.*] Which is the largest town in your district?—Hamilton.

3. What is its population?—Under two thousand.

4. Have they a market day?—Well, they have sales on certain days, and that to a certain extent may constitute a market day; but the sales take place on different days in different townships. It is not what you would call a market day from a business point of view. It brings more people into the town, but it is not called a market day. I have no statistics on the subject, but I may say that a great deal of business is done in the towns on the Saturday evening when men come in from their work.

5. Have you any opportunities of judging individually, or are you only giving evidence from what you have been asked by people in the district to give?—I have lived in the district for over twenty-five years, and ought to know something about it.

6. What is your employment?—I am a farmer.