

and about 8 o'clock there came a knock at the door. There were three individuals with pictures, who wanted them framed, but they could not come in the daytime because they were working. We do not ask for any privileges, but we want liberty. We are tied down hand and foot, and it is as much as we can do to pay our way. I think we should have our liberty, and be allowed to do our business in legitimate hours. I have been observing the law, to my misfortune. It was the law, and we must abide by it. My shop comes under the Factories Act, but what is the use of keeping a shop open when all the others are closed. The place is too dismal, and there is no one about. I can assure you that the trade done in Newtown—and I speak after fourteen years' residence—is in the evening, and not during the day.

SAMUEL LATHAM ROBERTS examined. (No. 46.)

173. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—An ironmonger and crockery-dealer.

174. Will you make your statement?—Yes. As I think the ground has been gone over sufficiently, I will just say that I have kept the law, and that my takings have been 25 per cent. less than they were before the Act came into force. Especially in the crockery and fancy-goods trade the trade is a catch one, and is done at night. People used to come out and buy, but since I have closed my shop at night the falling-off has been fully 25 per cent. I have no assistants except my wife, but I could get no satisfactory answer from the Labour Department. Although others have not been doing it, I have kept the law. As has been stated before, most of the people living in Newtown are workers in town, and instead of buying at night they buy in town, because they cannot get up to Newtown before shutting up time. I know that all classes of people have suffered, and that trade has fallen away. Of course, it means this, that if trade falls away like that some one has to suffer—either the landlord or the merchant. If all those shopkeepers who do not employ assistants are not compelled to close I think we should be thoroughly satisfied.

ALEXANDER CROSKERY, of Riddiford Street, Newtown, examined. (No. 47.)

175. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—Draper.

176. Do you employ any assistants?—I used to employ my wife, but I found I could do the work myself, and gave her the sack. Regarding this Early Closing Act, I recognised the moment it came into force that it would mean ruination to my business. I tried to get information as to whether a wife was the assistant within the meaning of the Act, and I could not get a satisfactory answer, so I thought that rather than “go up” for £3 10s. I would give her the sack. Business in Newtown cannot be done between the hours of 8 in the morning and 6 in the evening. When I first started business, three years and a half ago, I never opened my shop until 12 or 1 o'clock in the daytime, and always kept open at night.

177. Until what time?—Until the customers stopped coming in—there was no limit to the hour. Sometimes I might close early, if it was raining and there were no customers about, but for the first twelve months I never opened my shop until 12 o'clock. How are we tradesmen of Newtown to get support if the workers are away all day in the city. They have to go from home early to get to their work at 8 o'clock or half past. We open at 8 o'clock and close at 6 o'clock, so that we are shut when they go to work in the morning and closed when they come home. We cannot supply that portion of the trade. The population being residential and a suburban one, people are in the habit of getting their teas in the afternoon and going out in the evening, and if they see something in the shop which pleases them they sometimes buy it. Ours is merely a catch trade. You merely catch their business because they see something that they would like. I would like to ask how the people living in Miramar can deal with tradesmen in Newtown. They are working from 8 o'clock in the morning till 5 o'clock in the afternoon. Living over there they cannot get washed and dressed and ready to come out until after our shops are closed. A man must feel in a good humour before he is going to buy anything. If Saturday afternoon as the half-holiday is brought into force we shall be thrown out of the business altogether. At present the worker has the chance to buy on the Saturday night, but what chance would we have to sell if we had to close on Saturday as well. Since the Act came into force I have employed nobody. I got rid of my wife as an assistant, and do the work myself. I have shut my shop up to attend here, and there may be customers waiting. Last Tuesday I opened at 2 o'clock, but took nothing at all from 2 o'clock till 6. From 6 o'clock onwards I took £9. On the Monday I took 7s. 6d., and in the evening £6. That will prove to you that the trade at Newtown is done at the night-time, and if the people were asked whether they would prefer not to open at 8 o'clock in the morning and to have their night trade, you would get a majority of nine out of ten to agree to open after dinner and to trade at night. We do not get the day trade—the night trade is the suburban trade.

ARTHUR STEADMAN, of Newtown, examined. (No. 48.)

178. *The Chairman.*] What business do you carry on?—I am in the boot and shoe trade. The Newtown population consists of the working-class of people. There are brickmakers and other people who are employed during the day who have not an opportunity of buying their boots in the daytime. They have to do so after they knock off work at night. A man comes in after 6 o'clock and gets measured for his boots, whereas he has not that opportunity given to him in the daytime because he is at work. Early closing means a great deal to us, because we lose a considerable amount of trade through it. During the daytime other people get into the trains and go away to town and therefore, we lose that class of trade. It is mostly the working-classes that we do the trade with, and they have to do their shopping after 6 o'clock. For instance, last week I had a knock at my shop-door and found two customers; I lost one of them, who wanted a pair of gum boots, and the other wanted ordinary boots. I said it was after 6 o'clock and I was not open. But I went down the street afterwards and found other shops open, and thought what was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander, so I have opened my shop this week. I