

55. And that that part of the clause should be struck out?—Yes.

56. Then, we understand that the businesses you are representing would be seriously injured if there was a closing-hour fixed as proposed in the amending clause, section 3 of subsection (1), which we have just dealt with?—I do not think they would have any objection to being ruled by three-fifths of a majority, but, of course, in the suburbs we have to be there to do business when business can be done. For instance, 9 o'clock on Saturday is simply ridiculous, as far as we are concerned. I have closed, myself, since the law has been enforced as near to 9 o'clock as I possibly could. Only last Saturday, from 8 till 9, I was standing on the footpath talking, and I remarked that this was the worst hour, from 8 to 9. At 9 o'clock we started to get busy. I said to my assistants to get away at 9.30 sharp, and when they left I had three or four customers to attend to. I attended to the customers, and when I had finished it was a minute to 10, and from the time the assistants had left till then I took £2 16s. 8d., in the thirty minutes. I claim that there is no suburban or town shopkeeper who can afford to throw £3 away on any Saturday, which would mean a good round sum in the year. We in the suburbs would like to keep open to 10 or 10.30 on the Saturday night.

57. Have the employees, as far as you know, complained at any time prior to the passing of "The Shops and Offices Act, 1904," with reference to the hours that they had to work at night?—No, sir. I might say, when the petition was got up in Auckland, my assistants, on their own initiative, got a number of people to sign it, and every customer they asked did so, and the assistants signed it themselves, because they knew that if we had to close one of them would lose his position.

58. Are the employees desirous that the hours should be restricted so that business premises should be closed earlier—did they express any wish about it prior to the operation of the law?—I do not think so.

59. Have you heard so?—No, I have not.

60. In your opinion it is in the interests of the people, for their convenience, that the shops should be kept open as they were prior to this Act being made law?—Yes, exactly. Take the tailoring trade in the suburbs of Auckland, it is principally done in the evening. It is impossible for a working-man to get measured, or get a suit of clothes tried on when at work. This is one of our greatest difficulties.

61. What is your experience with regard to each shopkeeper: are they generally in favour of early closing at 6 o'clock?—Undoubtedly, because in Auckland City they close now—they always have closed at 6 o'clock; but I say this, that we have not got a large shopkeeper in Auckland at the present time that can turn back and say that he has not been very pleased indeed to keep open till 9 o'clock in past years.

62. Then the effect of the early closing would benefit the fat man to the detriment of the struggling shopkeeper?—Yes. We ought to have the same chance in life as the big shopkeepers. All the big people, when they started, kept long hours to work up their businesses.

63. *Mr. Sidey.*] I would like the witness to make it plain as to whether he objects to any closing-hour whatever?—Yes; I stated so.

64. No limit whatever, either 11 or 12 o'clock?—We have always been in the habit of closing at 9, and like to close at 10.30 on Saturday nights.

65. You would object to a statutory hour of 11 or 12 o'clock being fixed?—Yes, undoubtedly, because Auckland has very large suburbs, and we might, perhaps, be on a different footing to other centres.

66. I mean fixing some hour by statute at which all shops close, even supposing you make it 11 o'clock?—I do not think we should be dictated to at all.

67. Or even as to the limit to which assistants should be employed?—I should not object to that. We do not wish to work assistants after 9 o'clock; but still, it might arise in the busy seasons when it would be convenient for us to keep open for an hour extra, and why should we be deprived of that?

68. *Mr. Laurensen.*] You object to any hour of closing being fixed by law?—Yes.

69. And you say 9 o'clock for ordinary nights and 11 o'clock for Saturday would be a fair thing?—Yes, that would be what we were doing.

70. Do you think those are right hours for people to keep at work, say, from 9 o'clock in the morning?—I say, that providing employer and employee are working agreeably together, that there is no need for any one to dictate to them.

71. You do not agree to any hours being fixed at all?—No. We are agreeable to have fifty-two hours a week for our assistants, or even less, but we want the assistant to work when convenient for our business.

72. Do you think, if shops closed at 6 o'clock in the evening and 9 o'clock on Saturdays, that there would be less goods sold?—I do not say that. The business must be done; but it is done at the expense of the suburban shopkeeper. Since I have been closing it has made a difference of 33 per cent. to my takings.

73. You could only keep the business by working those hours?—Yes.

74. *Mr. EU.*] Can you suggest a way out of this difficulty—you see a number of the shopkeepers have carried a resolution at Port Chalmers in favour of clause 3, provided that all are brought into line—can you suggest anything? You say you want unlimited hours?—I say that if they want to close at 6 o'clock we do not object, but it suits us to keep our shops open later than 6.

75. They want it done by statutory enactment?—We do not ask for it.

76. You ask for a special Act to deal with Auckland?—We do not want any law at all. I think, when you made a law regulating the assistants, you should not dictate to the employer.

77. You think we should ignore the Port Chalmers people?—I still say we do not want to be dictated to.