

188. Do you approve of clause 21 or not? For a bare majority of the shopkeepers to decide at what hour they shall close: are you agreeable to that clause?—I would not object to three-fifths.

189. With respect to clause 3, subsection (1) of the Shops and Offices Act Amendment Bill, have you seen that?—Yes.

190. You say it is impossible that that clause could operate without very seriously affecting the working of your business?—Yes.

CHARLES GEORGE LAURIE examined. (No. 60.)

191. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—I have been appointed delegate with Mr. Carter, to represent the Auckland retail confectioners, and I have also a letter asking me to represent the employees, which says, "Would you please represent the employees in the manufacturing confectionery trade of Auckland, in support of the petition which was sent by the employees to Wellington *re* the closing of the retail shops at 6 p.m."

192. When was this petition sent?—On the 23rd November, 1904, with two hundred-odd signatures, petitioning against clause 3. I may say that the employees in Auckland have not a union, but they have an association which was formed just about the time the trouble came on with the Shop Hours Bill. They knew that two-thirds of the confectionery trade was done after 6 o'clock at night, and they also knew that if this clause was enforced against the retail confectioners it was going to be a very great hardship to them, because confectionery was only a luxury, and it was bought when the workers were at leisure. When people go to the theatres, a large number of them buy lollies at the same time. If the shops are closed, you do not buy lollies the next day because you were at the theatre the previous night. They see that two-thirds of the trade will stop, and, therefore, two-thirds of the employees will be got rid of from the factories, and that is the reason they are protesting against this Bill. Twenty-two years ago, I started a retail and manufacturing business in Auckland. I have now some forty-odd employees and two shops, and I have put all I earned into the plant, but if this Bill is enforced it will mean the confiscation of my property. I can quite indorse what Mr. Carter has said, and I say we must have total exemption. We are quite satisfied with fifty-two hours a week for our employees—they have never murmured as to the hours they have to work. I do not know of any employer who has had a complaint from any of his employees as to the number of hours they work, and they are quite willing to fall in with the hours to suit the business.

A deputation representing warehouse employees of Auckland in attendance.

GEORGE SQUIRREL examined. (No. 61.)

193. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—An accountant at Archibald Clark and Sons, (Limited), Auckland.

194. And you represent the Auckland warehouse employees?—Warehouse, entering-room, and office employees.

195. Have you an association?—No, but as proof of our position here this afternoon, I have brought a copy of the notice convening the meeting of those employed.

196. Was it advertised?—Advertised by circular. And this is the resolution come to. [Documents produced.]

197. How many attended the meeting?—About thirty-five or thirty-six, I think it was. That resolution is signed by the chairman.

198. How many in the line would there be in Auckland altogether?—There are twenty-three warehouses, large and small. The large warehouses have a staff of eighty—entering-room and office employees numbering from ten to twenty. Of course the meeting was called especially for office and entering-room employees, they only being affected.

199. How many would there be at the meeting—one quarter of the total number?—Quite that. One representative of each house would have been quite sufficient, because they voiced the opinions of the others.

200. Will you make your statement?—Yes, sir. The object of our appearing before you does not seem to be, on the face of it, a very formidable matter, but it means a considerable difference to us as office employees in the Auckland warehouses. I hold here a copy of the Shops and Offices Act passed last year, and I would just draw your attention to the interpretation of the word "shop." "Shop" means any building or place in which goods are kept or exposed or offered for sale, or, in which any part of the business of the shop is conducted, but does not include a warehouse doing exclusively a wholesale business." Now, on the face of it, ninety people out of a hundred, I presume, would say "You are exempt." Naturally so; but, under the interpretation of the word "office," as follows: "Office means any building in which any person is employed, directly or indirectly, to do any clerical work in connection with any mercantile or commercial business or calling carried on therein by the occupier thereof; but does not include any solicitor's office or any mining company's office, miners' union office, or any building or room in which the clerical work of a factory or shop is carried on if situate within the factory or shop"—under that definition of "office" the whole office staff of a warehouse is brought under the Bill. The consequence is that perhaps about one-third of the employees of the large wholesale warehouses in Auckland are brought under the provisions of the Shops and Offices Act; the balance of the employees are exempt. Now, we take it that this is wrong in principle, because the employers make no distinction between office assistants and warehouse assistants. They are all part and parcel of the same staff to carry on the business. In order to get relief from the operation of this clause, we would respectfully point out that the amendment which was moved in the House last session by Mr. Baume, that is, that the word "warehouse" should be inserted before the word "factory," so that the end of the clause would read "does not include any solicitor's office or any