

449. *Mr. Alison.*] Prior to the passing of the Act, did the employees represent to the employers that they desired legislation to compel all shops to open at a given hour and to close at a given hour—that is to say, the employees in connection with your union?—Well, it was decided in the first place to call a meeting for the purpose of forming the union, and when that union was formed it was determined to make a statement and present it to the masters first for consideration, to see if it was possible to come to an amicable agreement with regard to the hours and the payment of wages. I was not the president nor a member of the union at the time, but I believe that statement was presented to the masters, and they declined to consider it. As a consequence it was placed before the Arbitration Court, and the Court decided all the matters I might say in our favour.

450. You misunderstand my question: has your union at any time made representations to the Government in favour of a fixed hour for the opening and closing of shops?—No, I do not think so; not to the Government.

451. Have you made representations in any other quarter?—Not that I know of.

452. Are you in favour of the shops being closed at 6 o'clock?—Not all shops. As regards the one-man shop, we do not pretend to stop anyone from getting the privileges he seeks. But we do believe that it is only right that an assistant working where there is only one man should be allowed to leave off work at 6 o'clock as well as the assistant working for a man who employs eight or ten assistants.

453. At what time did the shops close prior to the passing of the Act?—I know of some shops that did not close until 8 or 9 o'clock at night.

454. And since the Act became law are they all closing at 6 o'clock?—No; I have already stated that the Act has been violated, and in this way, that we neglected as a union to ask for the keeping of a time-book, and there are places in Auckland now where the assistants are called upon to work till 8 or 9 o'clock. There are some where the assistants are working after 6, even now.

455. Taking the grocers' shops as a whole in the combined district of Auckland, do they close at 6 o'clock?—No.

456. Has the law been enforced?—No.

457. Have there been any prosecutions to compel the closing of the shops?—No.

458. *Mr. Tanner.*] Is your union affiliated with the Trades and Labour Council?—Yes.

459. You do not know whether the Auckland Trades and Labour Council ever asked for 6-o'clock closing to be introduced?—I do not know.

460. You do not know whether any Trades and Labour Council did?—No.

461. *Mr. Fisher.*] Do you ever look forward to starting in business yourself?—Not in the grocery line.

462. I mean from this point of view: do you think it is likely—say in the Karangahape Road—that a young man without any assistants could open a grocery business, conform with the conditions present, and make a success of it?—No; not an entire success.

463. You think that if the Act were enforced it would absolutely preclude any man from starting in business?—Yes. If a man is denied the right to remain in the shop after 6 himself.

464. Have you had that point discussed?—No, but I have thought it over myself.

465. You do not think, if compelled to close at 6 o'clock, you could make a success of such a business?—Not as under other circumstances.

466. Do the large shops deliver late at night?—Yes.

467. Up to what time?—They deliver until 8 o'clock at night, but overtime is paid to the grocers.

TUESDAY, 11TH JULY, 1905.

JOHN McQUEEN examined. (No. 67.)

1. *The Chairman.*] I understand that you have come to give evidence with regard to the Shops and Offices Bill now before this Committee, on behalf of the Southland employers. I shall be glad if you will make your statements, covering as briefly as possible the various points that you wish to bring under our notice. What are you, Mr. McQueen?—A farmer, among other things.

2. What Southland employers do you represent?—I am the managing director of the Southland Frozen Meat Company, and I represent the Invercargill Employers' Association.

3. Will you make your statement in your own way, please?—The employers of Invercargill wish to have an amendment made in clause 12 of the Act, so that a main borough should have the same advantages in having the appointment of a majority of delegates as a city has in the representation of a combined district. A city has the power to appoint one more delegate than the outside boroughs. Otherwise the minority would control the majority. Take Invercargill, for instance. Nearly all the shops are within the main Borough of Invercargill. Each of the suburban boroughs, which with the main borough would compose the combined district, would have the same representation as the larger main borough, where there are many more shops and a much greater population. Then there is another point. Take for instance a draper's establishment where they have a factory and a shop all in the one building and under the control of one management. At the present time they are obliged to close the factory on Saturday—to make the half-holiday on Saturday—and if the local authorities have selected Wednesday, which in Invercargill is the half-holiday, then the half-holiday is observed by the factory hands on one day and the shop-assistants on the other. At the present time, however, the Inspector winks at the evasion. They are evading the law now practically with the consent of the Inspector, but they recognise that that is not a proper position to be placed in. It is merely on sufferance that they are carrying out what seems to them a proper system—that all the employees should get their holiday on the same day so that they could enjoy themselves together if they liked.