

52. So that the 9th November is provided?—Show Day, of course, would come in that week too.

53. *Mr. Taylor.*] You are quite satisfied with the Arbitration Court conditions?—Not altogether. There are a few amendments that would suit the employers if made, but in the main we are quite satisfied. As to the King's Birthday, Mr. Steele pointed out how there might be an inconvenience in connection with Show Day. The award provides for the observance of Show Day by the butchers, although, I think, the Act does not. It would be very inconvenient to have to close on King's Birthday as well, owing to there being a large number of visitors to Christchurch. So that, if it were possible, it would be much more convenient for the butchers to work under the arbitration award.

54. *Mr. Laurensen.*] You are working under an award, are you not?—Yes.

55. Under that award, what wages are you compelled to pay?—The minimum for journeymen is £2 11s. per week.

56. And what for your shopmen?—Up to £3 10s.

57. Are those the highest rates of wages paid in the colony?—Yes; with the exception of perhaps politicians and some other people.

58. Did the Court take into consideration, in making the award, the fact of your having to work long hours?—I believe so.

59. What do you ask: to be included in the exempted trades?—Yes, we think that would be fair—for employers and employees. I think that provision for the high wage was made because butchers work a little longer than mechanical trades, and that kind of thing.

60. If the hours were reduced to fifty-two for the men, would you then apply to have the wages reduced?—Yes; I think that in all fairness we should be called upon to do that, or else it would mean a considerable rise in wages—if they reduced the hours and did not reduce the wages.

61. To boil it down, what you ask is that the butchering should be placed amongst the exempted trades?—That is so.

62. *Mr. Tanner.*] I would like to ask Mr. Steele a question. Is it a fact, Mr. Steele, that in Christchurch most of the butchers have their meat killed at the abattoirs?—Yes.

63. Which are several miles distant from the city?—They are supposed to be five miles by rail; perhaps it would be six by road.

64. The butchers have to turn out very early in the morning in order to get their meat from the abattoirs?—There are one or two that get it in carts of their own.

65. How do they manage in other cases?—There are contractors.

66. Well, then, the contractors have to turn out early?—Oh, yes.

67. The meat is not brought down to the station by any special train?—No.

68. Therefore the butchers must, in the summer-time, start very early in order to get their meat to the shops?—Yes.

69. And that increases the length of the day in a way that does not apply in other towns?—It applies everywhere.

70. We were given to understand the other day that in Wellington the meat is brought down by rail?—That may be so. Of course, I do not know anything about Wellington; but there is not a place on the face of the earth where butchers do not have to make an early start.

71. But this bringing-in of the meat from such a distance in carts creates an exceptional circumstance in the case of Christchurch?—Yes.

72. Would it meet your case if the hours were shortened in the evening, so that you closed earlier than 6, and extended in the morning?—No; because when the town is open we have to be open as well.

73. Do you mean to say that you sell much during the last two hours? Is not the bulk of the business done in the morning?—No. If you come to my shop and take the cash for a week you will see. A man who goes into the butchering trade knows very well what he has got to put up with. No man could reduce the hours very well to less than they are at present—that is, fifty-six a week.

74. There are witnesses who tell us that the bulk of their trade—I refer to the retail trade—is done in the evening. Does that apply to the butchers?—There is a lot of trade in small goods, such as chop done in the evening. You see, if you restrict the spending-power of the people you restrict the earning-power. Take the Christchurch tramways, for instance. From April to May they carried forty thousand passengers; but when accommodation was made for the people, and they started running every ten minutes, they carried from 110,000 to 116,000 in one month. I say, then, that if the shops are shut the people have not got the spending-power; they cannot spend, and we cannot earn.

75. We do not want to limit you in your opportunities of selling; we only want to know as far as possible what are the best hours during which the trade can be done?—Under the system on which we are working now we could not condense the hours without having to shut up altogether.

76. What is the system you are working under, an award, or the Act?—No, an award.

77. Has the Act never been enforced in Christchurch?—No; not with us.

78. Have any attempts been made to enforce it?—Yes. The Inspector went to Mr. Knight's shop and told him he would have to shut. He also came to us. We tried to shut at 9, but we could not get the shop clear.

79. You are speaking of Saturday night?—Yes.

80. Would it hurt if you closed earlier than 6 on other nights?—Yes.

81. Then what you really want is exemption from the Act, or to be left under the terms of the award, in which case the Act would not apply to you?—Yes; but we would prefer to be exempt.

82. *Mr. Ell.*] How long have you been working under the present award?—Since 1902.

83. You have not found any serious inconvenience arise from it?—No. We did at first. We used to close at 6 before—we always did—and at 10 on Saturday nights.