

all hours. We have to pay our men according to the award, and the very moment the man has worked the specified time he drops his knife as if it were a red-hot iron. Your Shop Hours¹ Act has not hurt me so far, but if I have to observe it it will hurt me.

30. *Mr. Aitken.* You have not been obeying it, you mean?—I have been keeping open. As I said, I gave early closing a trial for one week.

JAMES SHARMAN, Pork-butcher, Christchurch, examined. (No. 18.)

Witness : Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, I can only corroborate what Mr. Andrews has told you. I have had about thirty-one years' experience in the pork-butchering in Christchurch, and I may say that if we are compelled to close at 6 on ordinary evenings and 9 on Saturday I think I shall have to say "Good-by" to shopkeeping. From my experience I find that between 8 and 11 on Saturday night I have taken more money than in any other time in the day. We start at about 8 in the morning to manufacture the goods, and by the time some of the goods are taken from the machine, and the smoke-house, and the copper, and put in the window it is after 4 o'clock. So we should not have much time to sell them between that hour and 6. If we were compelled to close at 9 on Saturday night we should have to start on the window at 8 o'clock. The goods are of such a perishable nature—in fact, they are more perishable than fruit. They have to be placed in their proper places in the cool-room, and some of them have to be put in salt, and the dishes have to be washed and the shop tidied up to have it clean on Monday morning. My boys, I might say, work from 8 till 6—about fifty-one hours a week—and the shop I take over myself every evening. None of my sons are there after 6.

31. *Mr. Alison* (to Mr. Seaton). You stated that some employers had dismissed their hands owing to the operation of the law?—That is so.

32. Has the law been enforced in Wellington?—It has been enforced since the 11th May.

33. Strictly enforced?—The Inspector went round and told shopkeepers that if they did not close they would be summoned. Some were fined. Some may have disobeyed, but the majority have conformed to the law. I think that chemists and tobacconists comprise those that have not complied with the law.

34. Then, the law has not been strictly enforced?—No.

35. How long did you say the law had been enforced?—Since the 11th May.

36. And it is still being enforced?—Yes.

37. Prior to the Act coming into operation did the employees complain of the hours they worked?—As chairman of our association, I can say that I have never heard a single complaint from any employee.

38. As representing the New Zealand Shopkeepers' Association, do you consider that the hour of closing shops should be fixed by Act of Parliament?—Undoubtedly not.

39. Do a majority of the shopkeepers of Wellington consider the clauses dealing with early closing as provided in the Bill passed by the House would work satisfactorily?—Undoubtedly not. The Wellington association is very much opposed to clause 21. They look upon it that a majority of one could close the minority, and it would be unjust to the smaller shopkeepers. As the Bill left the House it provided for a three-fifths majority.

40. The Shopkeepers' Association is opposed to clause 21?—Yes; equally with clause 3.

41. Which class of shopkeeper is most prejudicially affected by 6 o'clock closing, the large shopkeeper or the small?—I do not think the large shopkeeper is affected at all. He has never opened at night.

42. It really affects the small shopkeeper only?—Undoubtedly so.

43. Assuming that the Act were enforced strictly, what would be the effect upon the small shopkeepers?—To a great extent it would divert money into other channels. To a great extent it would benefit the large shopkeepers. We have in our association several large shopkeepers who close at 6, but they are quite in sympathy with the small shopkeeper. They recognise that they were small people once. Early closing would divert money into lots of channels. Take the night trade: there are lots of people who would not purchase at all if they were not able to purchase at night. I refer to such a business as the confectionery. There are lots of trades where people will do without a thing unless they can buy it at the time.

44. Are you of opinion that the enforcement of the law would have a ruinous effect upon a large majority of the small shopkeepers?—I feel confident that it would have.

45. You stated that a minority of the shopkeepers could not carry on their business if the assistants were not permitted to work after 6?—Yes, a minority.

46. Does your association consider that this minority should be permitted to employ hands after 6?—That is a question we have not brought up, because it is only just recently that the amendment has come under our notice. Personally, I think that as long as the assistants' hours are regulated by statute they should be allowed to be employed at any reasonable time. I look upon a reasonable time as being at any hour between 8 in the morning and 9 at night.

47. Do you consider that fifty-two hours a week is a reasonable enactment?—Yes; our association is perfectly satisfied with any sort of legislation as far as regulating the hours in concerned, but not the time when the assistants shall work.

48. Assuming that fifty-two hours a week are worked, do you consider that overtime should be paid after 6?—Personally, I would be quite willing to pay overtime if my assistants were brought back to work at night, which they are not.

49. Which clauses of the Act does your association object to?—We object entirely to clause 3 and clause 21—that is, the clause providing for compulsory closing at 6, and the clause which enables a bare majority of the shopkeepers to close the minority.