

127. How do you account for this : you are asking that, say, bootmakers' shops shall be allowed to keep open to any hour that they may desire to keep open to—that they shall be allowed to keep open after 9 on Saturday night : yet the people that you say will be inconvenienced here if the bootshops are shut at 9 can buy their boots in Christchurch before 9 o'clock ?—I do not know about the boot trade in Christchurch, but there is no doubt that some of the shops here do a very big night trade.

128. The business there is conducted between 9 in the morning and 6 at night on week-days, and up to 9 on Saturday night, yet the people are supplied with all their requirements ?—Yes.

129. Then there are other trades that your association mentions : fancy-goods dealers, picture-frame makers, booksellers—they all close at 6 in Christchurch ?—We are not wanting to compel them to keep open.

130. My point is simply this : that it seems to me to be largely a matter of habit amongst your people here that has forced upon you more lengthened hours than are absolutely necessary ?—We do not find it so. If it is a matter of habit, that habit should not be broken straight away at the price of ruining a large number of small shopkeepers. There is no reason why the Government should force an Act through the Legislature to make a man close at any particular hour.

131. But when members of the House are asked by shopkeepers in other parts of New Zealand to fix a certain hour for closing, or to give them power to close their shops by local option, do you not think it is the duty of the Legislature to listen to these requests ?—Undoubtedly so ; but I do not think that any particular town—there may be individuals ; for instance, in this town there are one or two traders who want to make the smaller men shut up at a certain hour, and they come begging and praying to every member of the House to have the shops shut early. I do not think any man who shuts late wants to. It is those who have already closed at 6 that want 6-o'clock closing.

132. I was told by two of your suburban storekeepers, and several in the suburbs of Christchurch, that they would like the shops closed within reasonable limits ?—I presume they already close at 6,

133. No ; they close at 8. They request that the hours should be uniform. You say that the shops are open to serve the convenience of the public ?—Yes.

134. Then if a law were passed to enable the public, say, by a vote, to fix the hour of closing, would you object to that ?—Yes, we should object to it ; because we should look upon it as an infringement of our own liberty.

135. *Mr. Hardy.*] Does your association, Mr. Seaton, approve of the shortening of the hours of labour, generally ?—I think the average hours of labour in New Zealand are sufficiently short already.

136. You do not understand me. Do you approve generally of the shortening of the hours of labour ?—As far as our association is concerned, that is a question that has never been brought up.

137. But do you approve of the idea of shortening the hours of labour ?—Further than they are already shortened ?

138. Generally ?—Oh, heavens ! no.

139. One of the other witnesses stated that you would rather work shorter hours if you could ?—Well, no one is fond of work.

140. He said that no one cared about long hours. Do you approve of that, generally for all workers ?—As far as the workers are concerned, I think the hours are limited already by statute ; but as far as the shopkeepers are concerned, I say that Government or Parliament have absolutely no right to interfere with a man's own individual exertions.

141. Do you not think that with improved facilities, improved means of transit, and improved systems of manufacturing goods, we ought to be able to shorten the hours of labour ?—I should say, increase them, and increase your export and import trade, and improve the colony's finances altogether.

142. That is another question altogether. This is what I want to know : With improved facilities, improved machinery, and improved means of transit, do you not think we could shorten the hours of labour, and would it not be better for everybody ?—I do not think so.

143. That is, provided you make as much money ?—Ah !

144. Would it not be better if the hours of labour were shortened, provided you made as much money ?—The employers themselves wish for absolutely no interference. If we could do as much trade in three hours as we do in twelve, we should be prepared for the Government to legislate ; but we are satisfied we could not.

145. But if you could make as much money, would you not like to have your hours shortened ?—Yes. As far as I am concerned, if I were in a position to close at night, I should be only too pleased to do so.

146. Then, if Parliament could devise a scheme by which the hours of labour could be shortened and you did not make less money, would you not approve of it ?—If Parliament could, but Parliament is not capable of doing it.

147. *Right Hon. Mr. Seddon* (to Mr. Brown).] How long was it after the early closing started that you found the falling-off in the sales of those standard works ?—*Mr. Brown :* The first week or so that we were shut at 6 the Frisco mail arrived, bringing a supply of magazines. The people who came down and were in the habit of buying the magazines found the shop shut, and the next day they did not come for them—they had gone on by steamer or train to some other place, and at the end of the week, instead of having sold out our supply, we had about two-thirds on hand.

148. Do you think these people got the magazines somewhere else where the shops kept open ?—At the railway-station, or the next place they visited.

149. But if every one shut up, these people, if they wanted their usual magazines, would have had to get them ?—They could not have purchased them, and the people who had imported them would have lost by it.