

The exemptions agreed to, and which were thought to be fair, were as follows : Chemists (to be allowed to sell medicines, dressings, medical and surgical appliances, provided the purchaser produces a doctor's order), fruiterers, confectioners, pastrycooks, and restaurants, including those who supply fish and oyster suppers for consumption on the premises. These are the decisions in regard to the matter come to at the last Trades and Labour Councils Conference. In support of those we are here to-day. With regard to the hours to be worked by the assistants, these to be limited to forty-eight per week. We came to the conclusion that it was a farce to have a so-called eight-hour law and yet have workers in different branches of employment working fifty-two, fifty-four, and a considerable number of hours over and above those ; that it was not conducive to the well-being of the community, the employee as well as the employer, that longer hours than forty-eight should be worked. Of course, it has been put before this Committee, I presume—it has been put before the public—that since clause 3 of the last Act was made law there have been great losses in different lines of business, owing to the people being unable to make their purchases previous to 6 o'clock in the evening ; and it is claimed that the workers can not do their shopping within the hours set out in the Act. Well, we, representing the workers, claim that we can do the whole of the shopping necessary between the hours of 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. As a family man I might say that outside of the getting of our paper in the morning from a boy there has been no shopping by our family after 6 p.m. Large numbers of other workers that I know have also adhered to the hours set out in the Act, and they find it is the same as I have found : that the whole of the shopping can be done within those hours, and done easily. With regard to the losses that have been inflicted, according to what we hear, we say that cannot have been because of the Shops and Offices Act of last session. The great depression of trade that we hear of, on the other hand, is not caused by the Act of last session for the simple reason that within a few weeks of its passing we heard the same cry ; and up to within about a month ago the Act was not enforced in this city, so that the loss could not have occurred through the passing of the Act. If one or two individual traders have suffered any loss, it is because they themselves have strictly adhered to the law while their competitors on the other side of the street and on either hand were keeping open and robbing them of the benefit of their loyalty to Parliament's decision. If there has been any loss in individual cases it has been through that. We also are aware of the position that is taken up by some people, who say that so long as the assistants get off after their eight hours' work Labour should be satisfied. Well, the Arbitration Court has gone into the various classes of labour and has invariably decided that forty-eight hours are sufficient to constitute a week's work, and we look to Parliament, as being the supreme Arbitration Court of the colony, to arbitrate between the people as a whole and their employees, the shopkeepers, and to say, What is good for one class of employee should also be good for the shopkeeper, even if he is acting "on his own." We find in every trade, whenever an award is gone for, that a great cry of "Freedom of contract" is raised up—that so long as the men are willing the employers and themselves should agree as to the hours they should work ; that if the men want to put in a few hours' overtime no one should have the right to say whether those men should work or not. But the Arbitration Court has decided that the Court should fix the hours. And we want Parliament, as the supreme tribunal, to take up the same position in regard to the people and their employees the shopkeepers. We hold that the people of the colony should be made to understand that there are certain hours within which they should do their shopping ; and I think that no inconvenience will be inflicted upon them after the first week or two's enforcement of the Act, when they get into the run of the ropes, for they would then always be prepared to do their shopping within the statutory hours. The cry we now hear is the same as was raised when the half-holiday was first enforced ; and to-day I do not think you would find a single shopkeeper in this city who would be prepared to give up his weekly half-holiday, even if he were allowed to do so by Parliament. We hope that the Committee will recommend proposals in support of the lines laid down by the Easter Conference of the Trades and Labour Councils, and we think there would be no difficulty at all once the Act was given a fair trial ; and had the Act been enforced from the time it was passed last session up to the present the shopkeepers of this city would have been one and all in favour of it ; but those who have observed it have had to compete with those who were allowed to keep open, and therefore a slight loss has been inflicted upon them. We think the Act should have been impartially observed by all.

WILLIAM THOMAS YOUNG examined. (No. 112.)

159. *The Chairman.*] What are you ?—I am here representing the Trades and Labour Council.

160. Are you secretary or president ?—I am ex-president of the Trades and Labour Council.

161. You have been appointed by the Council to come here and give evidence ?—Yes.

162. *Mr. Fisher.*] You might also mention that you are secretary of the Seamen's Union ?—Yes.

I was chairman of the last Trades and Labour Conference.

163. *The Chairman.*] At which this resolution was carried ?—Yes.

164. Will you go on with your statement now, Mr. Young ?—I do not propose to speak on any subjects which have been dealt with by Mr. Hampton ; but, first of all, I desire to bring under the notice of the Committee the various resolutions that were passed by the Trades and Labour Councils Conference, in respect to early closing, in 1903, 1904, and 1905. The 1903 resolution was to this effect : That the Government be urged to pass the Shop Hours Bill, and that shops be closed at 6 p.m. on five days in the week and 1 p.m. on Saturday. The 1904 resolution was to this effect : That the Government be urged to pass into law a Shop Hours Bill providing for a uniform hour of closing and a compulsory Saturday half-holiday, and that shops should close at 6 o'clock on five days of the week and at 1 o'clock on Saturday. At the last Conference, held in Wellington, it was decided to recommend that all shops should be closed at 6 p.m. on five days of the week and 1 o'clock on Saturday, subject to the necessary exemptions. So it will be seen from that that the request, so far as we are concerned, is nothing new ; but that for the past few years we have been urging upon the Government the desirability of legislating