

ping District shall be in every week as follows : On Monday and Tuesday, 6 o'clock ; on Wednesday, 1 o'clock or 6 o'clock, whichever of these times is chosen by the shopkeeper in pursuance of this Act ; on Thursday, 6 o'clock ; on Friday, (a) 6 o'clock, where the closing-time on the preceding Wednesday was 1 o'clock ; (b) 9 o'clock where the closing-time on the preceding Wednesday was 6 o'clock ; on Saturday, (a) 1 o'clock where the closing-time on the preceding Wednesday was 6 o'clock ; (b) 9 o'clock where the closing-time on the preceding Wednesday was 1 o'clock : Provided that this clause shall not apply to Christmas Eve or in so far as it fixes the closing-time before 9 o'clock to the week-day immediately preceding any public holiday, but so that no shop shall remain open for trade after 6 o'clock on more than one day in any week." The Schedule is to this effect : "The First Schedule.—Chemists and druggists, restaurants, eating-houses, and refreshment-shops, cooked meats and butchers and bakers' small goods, fish and oyster shops, fruit, flower, and vegetable shops, tobacconists, hairdressers, confectioners, news-agents and book-stalls at railway-stations, undertakers, publichouses, licensed wine-shops." Those are the exemptions under that Act. The next is the Queensland law on the matter. It is embodied in the Factories and Shops Act, which was passed in 1900, and assented to on the 28th December of that year : "Part VIII.—Hours of Business in Shops.—50. (1.) Save as hereinafter mentioned, the provisions of this Part of this Act shall not apply to the shops and establishments of the classes following, namely : Chemists and druggists' shops, confectioners' shops, fish and oyster shops, fruit, vegetable, and temperance-beverages shops, hairdressers' shops, restaurants and refreshment-shops, tobacconists' shops, booksellers' and news-agents' shops, undertakers' establishments." Then, section 51 reads, "Subject to the provisions of this Act, all shops shall be closed on the business days of every week at the hours following, namely : On the evenings of Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, at the hour of 6 o'clock, on the evening of Friday at the hour of 10 o'clock, and on the afternoon of Saturday at the hour of 1 o'clock : Provided that if the day appointed for the half-holiday as hereinafter provided is a day other than Saturday, all shops shall be closed at the hour of 1 o'clock in the afternoon of the day so appointed, and the occupier may keep his shop open on the evening of Saturday up to the hour of 9 o'clock, but, unless the day so appointed is Friday, shall close his shop on the evening of Friday at 6 o'clock : Provided also that on the three business days preceding Christmas Eve he may keep his shop open up to the hour of 10 o'clock in the evening, and on the business day next preceding Christmas Day up to the hour of 11 o'clock."

169. *Mr. Kirkbride.*] Is there anything in regard to the opening-hour in the morning ?—No, there is nothing in respect to the opening-hour in the morning in these three laws ; but it will be seen from these that we are considerably behind the times in this connection. It will be seen that the hours of closing in these three States is 6 o'clock, and that in Queensland they go much further inasmuch as they provide for the Saturday half-holiday or very nearly so. I can only repeat in a sense what Mr. Hampton has said, that had the measure which was passed here last session been enforced from its inception I do not think there would be a great hostility to the early-closing provisions at this juncture. In support of this statement I would like to draw the Committee's attention to the very severe criticism that was made when the original Act was passed in 1894, which provided for a half-holiday in the week. I myself can remember paragraph after paragraph and letter after letter being written, and meeting after meeting being held, at which we were told that the new law was going to drive capital out of the country, that industries would be paralysed, that plants would be lying idle, and I do not know what was not going to occur. But what is the position to-day ? After practically eleven years' experience of that measure I am open to say that the people would not now go back on that provision, notwithstanding all the criticism. We were also told on that occasion—I can remember it fairly well—that the new law would drive the small shopkeeper entirely out of business, and that it was a measure in support of the larger shopkeeper. Take the City of Wellington : we find here to-day, after this period has elapsed, that the small shopkeeper, instead of being wiped out of the business altogether, has increased by about 25 per cent., and is doing fairly well.

170. *The Chairman.*] Has increased about 25 per cent. in number ?—Yes, in number. And I venture to say that after we have had a little experience of a measure of this description the same result will eventuate. What is involved in this measure ? It is not altogether the question of the shop assistant that is involved here. You provide for him by distinct clauses which say that he shall not be worked more than fifty-two hours per week. We assert that he should not be worked more than forty-eight per week. But I say that the main principle involved in this measure is the question of competition. I know a very large number of shopkeepers in Wellington who tell me that they are anxious to close at 6—not the large shopkeepers, but the small shopkeepers—they are anxious to close at 6, and to get away from their business for the day and go to their homes—to their wives and families—and thus have some little enjoyment in the course of their lives ; they tell me that they cannot possibly do that so long as a man, probably in the same line of business, on the opposite side of the street or next door if you choose, is permitted to remain open. This man wants to keep his shop open for probably fourteen or fifteen hours out of the twenty-four, and work himself in a manner that a slave would be worked, so to speak—this man compels the fair trader next door to him to keep his shop open also. I therefore say that the main principle involved in the early-closing clause is not the question of the shop-assistant at all, but it is the question of fair competition. We must have fair competition all round. This matter can be fairly well illustrated by a petition that I have seen, which was signed by close on two hundred shopkeepers, and was in favour of the early-closing clause—section 3 of the Act—as it appears on the statute-book.

171. I presume you allude to the petition that the Shop-assistants Association got up ?—Yes, I allude to that petition. I would just like to say this : that I have taken a very keen observation of the opponents of this measure, and as a matter of fact, at their last meeting in the Theatre Royal, which several members of Parliament attended and addressed, I should say about 15 per cent. of the audience were Chinamen. In fact, I felt very uncomfortable where I was sitting, because there were ten China-