

As I stated in my evidence, in my own home we can do it in three hours. My wife does the shopping. There is not a man in forty who does the shopping.

391. *Mr. Hardy.*] Is it within your knowledge that in order to do business on the Saturday, those Jewish firms employ Christians to manage their business?—I am not aware of that.

392. Would it surprise you if I told you that such is the case?—No.

393. I know that throughout the length and breadth of the colony, in order to compete with other people they employ Christian managers?—I am not aware of that.

THURSDAY, 20TH JULY, 1905.

William Burbidge and Walter Burgess attended the Committee.

*The Chairman.*] I understand that you gentlemen have come here this morning for the purpose of giving evidence in connection with the Shops and Offices Bill, as it affects the fruiterers in Wellington. Will one of you make a statement?

WILLIAM BURBIDGE examined. (No. 114.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—I am a fruiterer and greengrocer.

2. Where is your place of business?—I have two; one on Lambton Quay and one in Webb Street.

3. Do you and this other gentleman simply represent yourselves, or do you represent a number of others?—No, we represent the European fruiterers.

4. How many European fruiterers are there in Wellington and suburbs?—I suppose there are about twelve now.

5. And how many Chinamen or Assyrians—whatever they are. How many other than Europeans?—I could not say exactly. Roughly, I should think about fifty or sixty. There may be more; but at any rate there are quite that number.

6. And you represent the whole of the Europeans?—Well, of course, more would have come up if you had thought it necessary.

7. But you represent those that are not here?—Yes.

8. Will you make your statement, please?—Yes, sir. I would first like to say that we should like to be exempt from the provisions of this Act; that is, the European fruiterers and greengrocers. We are at present being exempted, but we thought it necessary to come and place our views before you, and to point out that in the main thoroughfares we have high rents to pay, and are under considerable expense, and to close us up at 6 o'clock at night—well, it would mean ruin. We could not keep the shops on; we could not pay the expenses. I would like to point out that the hotels are open in the evening till 10 o'clock, and, in the summer-time especially, there are a large number of people, both visitors and residents of Wellington, who would far rather have a little fruit—apples, pears, and bananas—than go into a hotel and get a glass of ale. Therefore, we consider that fruit is more a refreshment than is the liquor. That is one reason why we think we should be exempt from the provisions of this Bill. Another reason is our very heavy expenses. As you gentlemen are aware, the rents in the main thoroughfares are very high, and the wages of the assistants also, in view of the hours they work, come very heavy upon us. We would therefore ask to be exempt, so that we might keep our shops open to make both ends meet. There is another point that I would like to touch upon, and that is the Chinese competition. We European fruiterers do not ask that the Chinese should be exempt, because their expenses are much less than ours. There is a vast difference between their mode of living and ours. They have no wives and families to support; we have. We have also our houses to furnish and our children to provide for; and therefore we think that this Committee should give us a little consideration. We would like to see provision made in the Bill that exemption should apply only to Europeans, for the reason I have just given. I have no animosity against the Chinese personally. I think there are some very good and very decent people amongst the Chinese here in Wellington; but I must say, having been in the trade for a long time—I have been in the trade longer than any European in this city—that it is a very hard matter for a European to make a living. I think, gentlemen, that if you were to consider that, you would do a great deal towards helping to solve the Chinese question in the City of Wellington. In Wellington, a considerable number of European fruiterers have started in business since the Shop Hours Act has been in operation. I think that about half a dozen have started. Well, that is a considerable number, considering the number of European fruiterers there are in Wellington altogether. That represents nearly half. And I think this has been on account of the Shop Hours Act closing the Chinese up at 6 o'clock and allowing the Europeans to keep open. I think myself that if we were to be given that privilege there would be a far greater number of Europeans commencing business here in Wellington. Then, I would like to point out, as regards the Chinamen's assistants and our assistants, that we are only allowed to keep ours a certain number of hours per week, whereas their assistants work—well, from about a quarter past 6 till 11 or 12 at night. Therefore, it is unfair competition to us in that respect. Then there is a thing I would like to contradict. I suppose some of you gentlemen have seen statements in the papers about the price of fruit being so much lower since the Shop Hours Bill came into operation. Well, I do not think this statement is true. We European fruiterers cannot see it, and we do not hold with the statement at all. The price may be slightly lower, but I think that is more on account of the trade being rather duller this year. Trade is not so good this year as it has been in previous years. I do not think the facts bear out the statement. In closing, I would just like to state that we are quite willing to allow the assistants to work only the number of hours that they work at present, but we think Parliament might let us keep our assistants in the evenings—some evenings in the week—so as not to make the masters