

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

WEDNESDAY, 3RD NOVEMBER, 1909.

ELIJAH CAREY examined. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your name?—Elijah Carey.

2. What do you represent?—I am secretary of the local Cooks and Waiters' Union, and also a member of the Wellington Trades and Labour Council.

3. Do you give evidence on behalf of the Trades and Labour Council?—On behalf of my union particularly, and generally on behalf of the Council.

4. Are you the only representative of the Council?—I understood another representative was to come along.

5. Have you read the Bill before us?—Yes.

6. Would you like to make a statement with regard to it?—Yes. I should like to say that for years and years the workers of New Zealand have been advocating a measure similar to this. It was mentioned at the 1902 Conference, and since then it has been frequently before the various labour bodies, especially at the Conferences of the Trades and Labour Councils last year and also on this occasion. The people I represent are of opinion that, seeing such measures are enacted in other countries less progressive than is New Zealand, it is time that some steps were taken in the direction of giving the employees concerned one day's rest a week—namely, that they shall work only six days a week. My attention was drawn some two and a half or three years ago to the French Act on the subject, which does not go quite so far as Mr. Fisher's Bill, but which covers nearly every servant employed. The Act is contained in Volume i, page 185, of the Bulletin of the Labour Office, and will be found in the Labour Department here, which stocks these books. The 1st section in that Act provides that "No employee or workman shall be employed more than six days a week in an industrial or commercial establishment, whatever its nature, whether public or private, lay or religious, or even if it exist for the purpose of professional instruction or of benevolence. The above holds good of all branches of establishments. The weekly day of rest shall consist of not less than twenty-four consecutive hours." That measure was passed in the French Chamber of Deputies by something like 400 to 1 in 1906. Since then Italy has followed in that direction, and passed a measure a little more drastic than the measure I speak of. I find that in France it is provided that in certain cases employees belonging to different classes in an establishment get off in rotation, and included in the list of people to which the day may be given by rotation are employees in hotels, restaurants, hospitals, almshouses, asylums, lunatic asylums, dispensaries, newspaper offices, contractors for electric lighting, and several others. I will mention particularly hotels and restaurants because it is a trade in which I have worked. Previous to accepting the position of secretary to my union about two years ago I was working in the hotel and restaurant trade during the last ten or twelve years, in other countries besides New Zealand. Up till recently we have not been legislated for at all. Until the amendment of the Shops and Offices Act two years ago, whereby a half-holiday in every week was provided for, no consideration whatever was given to us. We approached the Arbitration Court in the matter of holidays, but the Court refused to deal with that, and suggested that it was a matter for the Legislature and not for the Court. The reference to this is contained in the addenda to our award. Amongst the men and women who work in hotels there are many who belong to the town in which they work and are married, and they feel very much that there should be some restriction in the number of hours they work. They consider that the employers could easily make arrangements whereby for one day a week at least they should not be at the beck and call of everybody. Our award provides for sixty-five hours a week in restaurants and tea-rooms in the case of male workers, and fifty-two hours for female workers, and for sixty-five hours in the case of all classes of hotel-workers. The Sydney workers in the trade applied to the Wages Board, and were able to justify their demand for restriction of hours to such an extent that the Wages Board agreed to give them not only the whole day asked for, but in places where the establishments opened six days a week and were not kept open on Sunday the employees were to be given a half-day off. I might say there are about twelve thousand workers in the trade in and about Sydney. We think it can hardly be argued that our trade is a languishing industry, or that it will not pay the employers to give us the privileges we are asking for. Considering the length of hours and stretch of day over which our work extends, we think we are entitled to some relaxation on one day of the week. Practically we start at from half past 6 to 8 in the morning, and finish at any time between 9 and midnight. Since we obtained an award from the Arbitration Court our conditions with regard to hours have improved, but they are a long way short of what is desired in New Zealand. In ordinary employment men work the eight hours straight off, but in our trade the employees are required to work at two, three, or four intervals during the time, so that they never have any time for themselves; it is practically all work and sleep. With regard to the half-day off, we are thankful to the Government and Parliament for giving us that; but it so happens that the employees have already worked eight or nine hours of the day before they get the half-holiday. In the case of ordinary hands they would only have to go back for two hours, so that the half-holiday only amounts to two hours' cessation of work. If the Government gave us the measure we desire, and that Mr. Fisher has introduced, it would not mean an extra expenditure of more than £3 per week to the large hotels or any hotel with a staff of forty-two servants.