

the Court for an award, if such union request the Court to provide hours, overtime, holidays, payment of wages, &c., in its award, the Court shall award such conditions, provided that they do not permit a shop-assistant to be employed in any one week, or in any one day, a greater number of hours than is prescribed in this Act—in clause 5 (b) and clause 8 (a). "Upon provision being made by the Court in any award for any matter contained in this Act, such trade shall be released from the operations of this Act in so far as the award provides." There is just one matter here. I do not know whether it really has much reference to the Shops and Offices Act or not. I suppose it is obvious to members that there is nothing in the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act which allows the Court the privilege of providing for fair conditions between employers. I refer to this matter particularly to point out what I mean. Some of the drapery shops in Wellington having as many as seven and eight assistants remain open every night of the week till 9 p.m. Now, the other shopkeepers—Kirkcaldie and Stains, the D.I.C., and those big houses—are compelled to comply with the conditions of an award of the Court and pay the wages, and they are unable to keep open till 9 o'clock, mainly on account of the size of their premises. Yet another employer keeps open, and he, I contend, ought to close if he can afford to employ eight assistants. If we could regulate the hours when a shop should open and when it should close in an award of the Arbitration Court, that would be a regulation as between employer and employer, and we could protect both the large man and the small man. The Shops and Offices Act regulates it to a certain degree by providing that certain shops have to close at certain hours and that certain shops may open at certain hours. But if an industrial organization is getting benefits from the employers, it seems to me to be fair that the employers should all be put on the same footing, provided that that footing is discussed in the Arbitration Court and thought to be fair. We do not see any difficulty in arriving at a satisfactory issue if we had the legislative power to do so, but under the present system we have no such power. Clause 5, subclause (b): Our union discussed this matter very fully, and Mr. Humphreys and I have been sent here to ask that "one o'clock" be deleted and "twelve o'clock" substituted, thus making the half-holiday commence at 12 o'clock. We submit that 12 o'clock is the time in all other trades. Wanganui shopkeepers have for some years been closing at 12 o'clock.

6. *Mr. Veitch.*] By mutual arrangement?—Yes. When I was up in Wanganui last in connection with the drapers' dispute there, Mr. McNiven, the manager of Paul and Co., informed me that it worked splendidly and there was no hardship on either side. I understand that in Feilding, Dannevirke, and Palmerston North they also close at 12 o'clock. With reference to 6-o'clock closing, I would just like to say that quite recently a number of employers in Napier tried very hard to get the hour reduced to 5.30, which is an indication that a reduction here would be appreciated by the employers and the employees alike.

7. *Mr. Davey.*] You say the employers tried to get it done?—Yes, in Napier. In Dannevirke they already close at 5.30, and in Feilding at 5 p.m. This is information that I have received from some of our members. With regard to the late night and keeping open then till 9 p.m., we would like to see this done away with altogether. We feel sure that, as in the case of the half-holiday, things would soon right themselves. I am referring to the half-holiday question of some years ago when Wednesday was made the half-holiday. However, if it is considered a little premature to bring about this abolition of the late night, we would respectfully suggest that the hour could easily be reduced to 8 o'clock without causing any inconvenience to any one. Our experience, and the evidence of the assistants working in the soft-goods houses in this city, is that there is no business done whatever between 5.30 p.m. and 8 p.m. on the late night, most of the people leaving their shopping till between 8 and 9 p.m., simply because they know that the shops close at 9 o'clock. If 8 o'clock were made the hour of closing we feel sure no one would suffer, as the public would use themselves to the change very quickly. This has proved to be the case with the butchers, who now close at 7 p.m. sharp in place of 9 o'clock as formerly.

8. *Mr. Anderson.*] Is that on the late night?—Yes. In the butchery trade, I may say, the goods are perishable, while our stuff can hang about from one day to another. There is nothing very perishable about it. It is simply a matter of bringing ours into line with these other trades. We contend that it would be an enormous advantage to the thousands of shop-assistants in this Dominion who work eleven hours on this day and are away from home for fifteen hours at a stretch. I was informed by the shop-walker in one house the other day that some of the girls were away for seventeen hours, taking the time they left home in the morning till they got back at night. But, as I said to him, that was mainly due to the place where they lived; they lived out at Upper or Lower Hutt, and could not catch the trains.

9. *Mr. Veitch.*] Apart from that altogether, what is the total stretch of time from when they go on in the morning till when they come off at night?—Thirteen hours, with the time off—that is, on the late day. Subclause (3) of clause 5: "For the purposes of this section every person engaged in or about the business of a shop other than the person," &c. We wish to ask that the words "and the members of his or her family" be deleted. We do not object to a struggling shopkeeper or his wife being allowed to serve in order to carry on their business if they are there by themselves; but we have cases in Wellington where shopkeepers have the whole of their family back. There is one man in Cuba Street, I think, who has three daughters back at night-time. He carries on a big business every night of the week, and the other shopkeepers, who are compelled by an award of the Court to comply with certain conditions, are handicapped by this—that this man can bring his wife and three daughters back. There are five of them serving in the shop at night-time.

10. *Mr. Anderson.*] Do they keep open after 6 o'clock?—They keep open till 9 every night in the week. If we could fix conditions between employer and employer in the Arbitration Court we would be able to settle that business.