

ALBERT JOSEPH HUMPHREYS examined. (No. 13.)

1. *Mr. Davey* (Acting-Chairman).] What are you?—President of the Drapers' Union here.

2. Do you wish to give evidence?—In case any evidence is required in substantiation of any of the facts that Mr. Croskery brought up I am able to endorse his evidence with respect to the absence of seating-accommodation for females in Wellington and with respect to the three-weekly payment of wages at Kirkcaldie and Stains's. I was employed there for about four years and a half, and during the whole of that time wages were paid regularly at three-weekly intervals. Three weeks is still the space of time that elapses between each payment.

3. *Mr. Hindmarsh.*] You get a fortnight's wages?—No; three weeks', fully paid up.

4. They keep nothing in hand?—No.

5. *Hon. Mr. Massey.*] Do the employees object to the three-weekly system?—They object—to us; of course, they do not object to the firm. For obvious reasons they prefer getting their money three-weekly rather than not get it at all. There is one matter in reference to this Shops and Offices Bill that Mr. Croskery has not spoken of, and that has always appealed to me as inflicting an injustice on a certain class of labour in New Zealand; it is the exemption of the wholesale houses from the operation of the Shops and Offices Act. Factories are dealt with regarding hours and general conditions of employment, &c., in the Factories Act; shops and offices are dealt with in the Shops and Offices Act: practically every class of labour receives some attention with the exception of the assistants in the wholesale houses.

6. I suppose you know the reason?—Yes, I believe it is because there was considerable agitation at the time they were proposed to be, owing to the fact that their trade is supposed to be a season trade and a great deal of overtime is necessary—so it was contended—at certain periods of the year. But the way their exemption operates is this: they work a considerable amount of overtime all through the year. I have spoken to numerous shopkeepers about it. I was speaking to the manager of George and Kersley's about it the other day, and he said, "I cannot for the life of me see why the assistants in the wholesale should be excluded from the operations of the Shops and Offices Act."

7. Do you speak on behalf of the warehouse assistants?—Yes.

8. *Hon. Mr. Massey.*] I was in Parliament when the matter came up on a previous occasion, and we were given to understand, by deputations that came along and by petitions forwarded to Parliament, that nearly the whole of the men employed in warehouses were dead against coming under the Shops and Offices Act?—That is so.

9. *Mr. Davey.*] You have no authority to speak on their behalf. I take it?—I am taking the opinions that have been expressed to me by wholesale men, and to some extent I believe I am justified in speaking here on their behalf, as wholesale men are qualified now to become members of our union, which exists now for the benefit of wholesale men as well as retail.

10. *Hon. Mr. Massey.*] The position is simple. When they want to come under the Shops and Offices Act we are quite prepared to put them under. But we are not going to compel them to come?—The employees in shops and offices were not consulted as to whether they should come under it.

11. *Mr. Davey.*] Have you any other evidence to give?—No; but if any endorsement is wanted of the facts the secretary brought up I shall be quite willing to answer any question.

FRIDAY, 15TH AUGUST, 1913.

WILLIAM EDWARD SILL, representing the Auckland Butchers' Industrial Union of Workers, made a statement and was examined. (No. 14.)

*Witness:* The principal items I wish to mention in connection with the Act are, firstly: Last year the butchers applied for an award as hitherto, including the hours, but the Court ruled that the award had been overridden by an Act of the Legislature. Therefore we are left with the Shops and Offices Act at present, and it does not come near what we were getting under the award. The hours have not really been increased—we were working fifty-six hours a week—but the times fixed for starting and knocking off work are far wider than we had previously when we had practically uniform hours of work. The time for starting work was 6 a.m., and for leaving off 5 p.m. Now the Act provides that the hours shall be from 4 a.m. till 6 p.m. The new Act permits butchers to commence work at 6 a.m. on ordinary days, 4 to 1 p.m. on the half-holiday, and up to 10 p.m. on the late night. The meal-hours under the Act provide for a meal every five hours. That is very unsuitable for the butchering trade, and I may say there is not a butcher in Auckland at the present time keeping the present Act in reference to meal-hours. It is simply impossible for them to do so, and the union never presses the point, because to a certain extent it is at least very irksome. Really what my union suggests is that our late hours shall be given back to us, but if you cannot see your way to concede that we ask for something to give us uniformity of hours as near as possible to the old award. Where the five hours does not operate is principally in the morning. At the present time the butchers start at 6 a.m. or 6.30. That is supposed to be the hour of starting, but we have already got into the practice of starting earlier in some establishments, and they give three-quarters of an hour for breakfast in some establishments and half an hour in others. The point is that if they start at 6.30 they must give an hour for dinner or a meal at 11.30, but very often they do not get their meal till 1, and very often it is 2 or 3 o'clock. What I want to suggest is this: that a meal-time of half an hour be fixed for those who start work before 6.30 a.m. As I say, we are not subject to an award of the Arbitration Court in regard to hours, and it was owing to a certain clause being struck out of the last amendment of the Shops and Offices Act that put us where we are, and, although I see