

and some on another, without any limitation, and I understand that is objectionable; but if Wednesday were made the half-holiday by statute, with provision to enable those who wished to keep it on Saturday to do so, that objection would be got over. Then, there should be no exemptions to the hours of closing. In Dunedin this keeping open at night is growing. You can understand that where a large shop is situated amongst a number of smaller shops, and these smaller shops are kept open till all hours, it is a great hardship on the large shops. If the compulsory closing of all shops is not carried on the four days in the week the practice will spread, and we shall be driven back to the old hours, and we very much object to that. If the Saturday half-holiday is carried that sort of thing will be carried on more than ever. We shall have shops all round keeping open till late. Then, there is another provision in the Bill which requires consideration, and that is the clause which requires that there shall be a requisition of two-thirds in favour of closing at 6 o'clock. The Town Clerk has to certify that the requisition has been signed by two-thirds of the shopkeepers; but there is no register of the number of shops in the town. How, then, is the Town Clerk to certify that the requisition has been signed by a majority of two-thirds? We should like to see it made compulsory that shops should be closed at 6 o'clock, and that those who want to keep open later should get up a requisition signed by two-thirds. When you consider the number of small shops—Chinamen and others—you will never get the required number to sign in favour of early closing; and then there is the point that there is no register of the number of shopkeepers.

Mr. McFARLANE examined.

1. *Mr. Laurensen.*] I understand, Mr. McFarlane, that you are in favour of compulsory closing of shops at 6 o'clock?—I am, sir.

2. When do the majority of shops in Dunedin close?—At different times. Some are kept open until 11 o'clock. There was one open a short time ago until half-past 11 o'clock. It had the gas burning at that hour.

3. I suppose the better class of shops close earlier?—Yes; they close at 6 o'clock. We agreed twenty-seven years ago to close at 6 p.m., and two or three years later others came into line.

4. You do as much business when closing at 6 o'clock as you did before?—I think from what I can remember we do as good a business. When we were farmers at the Taieri the shops were supposed to close at 6 o'clock, but on one or two occasions men would come and ask for a pound or two to get some necessaries. They got what they asked for although all the places were closed. I said to one, "You cannot spend that money although you have got it," and he said, "Oh, I can go into Outram and get into a shop through the back door, and get all I want."

Mr. MILLER examined.

5. *Mr. Laurensen.*] You said, Mr. Miller, that you were opposed to the Saturday-afternoon closing?—Yes.

6. You say it was tried for some time in Dunedin?—Yes.

7. Did every one close, or was it only a certain section?—The greater number of the grocers closed. Travellers going round for orders would be asked by customers, "Are you closing on Saturday afternoons?" and if you did not close they said, "We cannot give you the orders." The feeling of a certain section of the public compelled us to close on that occasion, but that feeling changed later on. One or two grocers who did not close on Saturday afternoon did a certain amount of business; but, as a matter of fact, the Saturday half-holiday was very inconvenient both to the traders and the customers.

8. You say the trade that used to come to Dunedin did not reach it through the Saturday-afternoon closing?—Yes.

9. Where did the trade go to?—I could not say. It did not come to the city.

10. You do not mean to say that the people were using less tea and sugar—they were still consuming the same amount?—I would not say that. For instance, a lady coming into the town might see something tempting and she would buy it.

11. Then, it was only the luxuries they had to go without, and their necessities they must buy somewhere, whether you were closed or not?—Yes; but, you see, the cheap fares on the railways, and the excursions, and that sort of thing bring the people into the town on the Saturday.

12. So that it comes to this: that if it is bad for the shopkeepers it is good for the husbands, as the ladies cannot spend the money?—Very likely.

13. You say that the cheap fares on Saturday bring the people into Dunedin. If there were cheap fares on Friday would it not do the same thing?—I do not think so. If the country people came in on the Friday they would have to go home again early, because they would have to be up early next morning to go to work. It is different if they do their business in town on the Saturday because then they have the Sunday rest before them.

14. From your own personal point of view—putting yourself in the position of wanting a holiday—would you like the half-holiday at the end of the week with the prospect of a day's rest before you, or in the middle of the week with the prospect of having to go to work the next morning?—From the holiday point of view I would prefer the Saturday, but from the business point of view I would prefer it not to be Saturday.

15. If matters could be arranged so that business would not be interfered with, you admit that it would be better to have the half-holiday on Saturday?—Yes.

16. One thing that interferes with business is that there are cheap fares on Saturday, and another is that working-men are paid on Saturday, so that they can spend their money on that night?—Yes.

17. Is it not a fact that very many of the large employers of labour pay their men on Friday?—I believe some do.