

assistants to go away because they may have to work on Sunday. We close now altogether on the Wednesday at one o'clock, but under this Bill we should have to pay an assistant to be in the shop on the Saturday afternoon to attend to prescriptions which might come in from doctors.

35. Do you think it would be well to close altogether?—No doubt. I think, if we gave our assistants a holiday on another day, we should be entitled to open on the half-holiday.

36. What exemption do you want with regard to closing on Saturday?—We should be allowed to open for two hours in the evening, besides being able to attend to special cases of urgency.

37. Is it not the case that some chemists open and that others do not?—No; not in town, at all events.

38. I gather from your answers to questions asked that your chief objection is in regard to the taking of apprentices without a premium?—I think the fact of not being able to take a premium would prevent men from giving their apprentices a proper insight into the business. They would not be bothered with apprentices. Some small men might, but then, they could not teach their apprentices the business properly.

Mr. C. P. SKERRETT in attendance and examined. (No. 18.)

39. *The Chairman.*] I understand, Mr. Skerrett, you would like to say something with regard to the Shops and Offices Bill. Will you be so good as to make any statement you desire?—Mr. Chairman, I represent the New Zealand Law Society, which practically represents the profession throughout the whole of New Zealand. I am here to ask you to consider the advisability of exempting solicitors' clerks from the operation of the Bill. In this matter the society is not so much concerned with its own interests as with the interests of the clerks. Solicitors' clerks do not desire to be brought under the operation of the Bill. There is a very strong feeling amongst them that it would be inimical to their interest that they should be brought under its provisions. There was a petition on the subject presented to the House some years ago, to which I would ask the Committee to refer, as showing what is their feeling on the subject. I can assure the Committee that there is a very strong feeling amongst the clerks upon the subject, and I can produce evidence from them that it is so. I have abstained from doing so because I know that your time is very much occupied, and I have not wished to trespass too much upon it. One thing must be patent to the Committee, and that is that the relationship between a solicitor and his clerks is not in any sense that of the ordinary employer and his employees. In our profession the employee of to-day may be the employer of to-morrow. In the old times there were two degrees of solicitors' clerks. There was the ordinary clerk and there was the articulated clerk. Now-a-days it is not uncommon for every clerk in a solicitor's office, from the boy to the highest grade, to study so as to qualify himself to enter the profession. I may say that in my office for years past every clerk, from the boy who has just entered to the senior, is studying to qualify for the profession. In many offices you will find three and four and five clerks away at the same time undergoing examinations or otherwise taking steps to enter the profession, and there is no objection on the part of those who employ them; but if you lay down hard-and-fast rules, as is proposed by this Bill, you may be sure that a bad feeling will arise, and that the friendly feeling which has hitherto existed between the solicitor and his clerks will cease. As to the compulsory half-holiday, I think that any Wellington member of the Committee will admit that solicitors' clerks have ample holidays as it is. Mr. Harrison, secretary to the Law Society, has prepared a return which shows that they get thirty holidays in the year. With regard to overtime, I desire to say that very little overtime is done by lawyers' clerks, and they are paid for it. There is, however, this to be said: that there are many occasions on which both the lawyer and his clerks have to work overtime. For instance, witnesses often come down from the country on the evening of the day before a case has to come on in the Court, and then both the lawyer and a clerk or two must be present in order to ascertain what a witness may have to say with regard to the case. And then again, a lawyer may have to be in Court all day, and other matters have to be put off until after five o'clock or till the evening, and they have to be attended to. There are other things which I might mention, but I do not think it is necessary to trouble you with them just now. But of this I am quite certain: that there is no desire on the part of the clerks to be included under the provisions of this Bill, and I can assure the Committee that it would lead to great friction. I should think the head of the Labour Department would be ready to confine the provisions of the Bill to those whom it will more immediately concern. I can only repeat that I have not brought any witnesses to support my statements, because I did not want to trespass too much on the time of the Committee; but if any question arises in the mind of the Committee as to the desire of the solicitors' clerks not to be included in the Bill, I shall be ready to call any witnesses the Committee wishes to hear. That is all I desire to say, and I shall be happy to answer any questions the Committee wish to put to me.

40. *Mr. Aitken.*] You represent the Law Society of New Zealand, and not only the Law Society of Wellington?—Yes.

41. *Mr. Barber.*] You do not indicate how we are to alter the Bill so as to meet the objections you have raised. Do you propose to strike out the clauses referring to offices?—I ask you to put solicitors' offices into the exemptions.

42. *Mr. Ell.*] I understand Mr. Skerrett to say that his objection is from the employers?—No; from the employees.

43. You state it would be very inconvenient to the employers?—I really do not think the Bill would affect the employers as much as it would affect the employees. The objection comes very much from the clerks themselves. I can assure you that their objection was entirely voluntary, and it is at their instance that the Law Society raises the objection.

44. As to being in Court, will they have to do the work afterwards?—As a rule that class of work is done by the principal and not by a clerk.

45. Then, it would not affect the clerks?—Of course, sometimes it might.

46. Then, it is an employer's objection?—Perhaps it would be fairer to say that the objection comes both from the employers and the employees. I desire to say that the New Zealand Law Society represents the wishes of the employees as well as of the employers.