

to pass, why should not the employee of to-day be the employer of to-morrow, and have the same chance as if he were in a lawyer's office?—There does not seem to be the same certainty of getting on.

Mr. DAWSON, Mr. PARADISE, and Mr. MORTON in attendance. (Nos. 19, 20, and 21.)

*The Chairman* : I understand that you represent the shop-assistants in Wellington, and desire to make a statement to this Committee in connection with the Bill which we have now under consideration. Do you represent the whole of the shop-assistants of Wellington?

*Mr. Dawson* : Yes. At a meeting of the shop-assistants at the Exchange Hall to consider this Bill a resolution was carried unanimously in favour of the compulsory half-holiday, and we were appointed a deputation to wait upon you and urge the favourable consideration of that provision. The half-holiday was given for the benefit of the assistants, and we think, everything else being equal, it is only fair we should have a voice in deciding on what day shall be the half-holiday. I say "everything else being equal" upon two important matters: that is to say, the convenience of the general public and how it will affect those who give the half-holiday—that is, the shopkeepers. I ask you to believe that we are not selfish in this matter. We consider that our employers' interests are the same as our own. We may some day be shopkeepers ourselves, and, although we might have to commence in a small way, we should be the last to advocate legislation which would be likely to interfere with our future. With regard to the convenience of the general public, we think that you have provided against any inconvenience to the public by the provisions of this Bill. Then, as to the question of how it would affect the small shopkeepers, we think that a late night on some other night in the week would answer all purposes. Of course, the small shopkeepers say that they do as much business on a Saturday night as they do during a whole day on any other day in the week, and I do not blame them for sticking up for the Saturday-evening business. I say they will not lose this business, because we should provide that they could keep open late on Friday night, and that would help them to do the business they would lose by closing on Saturday. Again, it has always been said—and it is one of the greatest factors in this Bill—that Saturday is essentially the shopping-day for the working-man, because he is paid at 1 o'clock on Saturday. I am bold enough to say that Saturday is the worst day on which to pay him. Furthermore, I do not think that half the working-men are paid at 1 o'clock on Saturday. The Harbour Board and the shipping offices do not pay their men on Saturday, and there are many of the other big employers who do not pay their employees on Saturday, while those who do would be quite ready to change their day of paying. As regards the men who get their pay on Saturday, I have seen some of them who leave their work at 1 o'clock on Saturday but who do not reach their homes within a reasonable time, and when they do get home they are *minus* a large proportion of their wages. If they were paid on Friday I say that the majority of working-men have such a regard for the proper state of things that they would go back to their work, and their wives would benefit, and no harm would be done to any one. The same amount of business would be done, and it is only a question of a certain amount of business taking a different channel. Again, it has been said that this would interfere with people coming in from the country to do their shopping. Well, "country" is a big word. If you mean people coming from twenty-five miles or further from the town, then I say the argument is altogether wrong. Those who come in from that distance do their work earlier in the week. I have been in this town for some sixteen years, and I can say that we have found Wednesday to be the best day for the country people as a whole. Another point is that the Wednesday half-holiday certainly dislocates business as a whole. There are many people who are put to inconvenience by the Wednesday half-holiday. It is, for instance, a great inconvenience to the shipping. I believe the shipping people feel it very much. There is only one thing, as far as I can say at present, in which this Bill does not meet with favourable consideration generally. I would ask you therefore to put a clause in the Bill to enable those who are interested in the half-holiday to say on which day it shall be held—that is to say, to have a voice in saying on what day it shall be held. It has been said that the shop-assistants do not want the Saturday half-holiday. I say we do desire it, and it is only fair that we should have a voice in saying on what day that half-holiday shall be held.

*Mr. Paradise* : I believe, gentlemen, that I have been asked to attend this Committee because I have gone through the experience of both the Saturday half-holiday and the Wednesday half-holiday. To put the matter in a concrete form, I challenged my present employer to allow me to take an account of the effect on the business of closing on the Wednesday afternoon for the two years previous between the hours of 1 and 6 o'clock, and between the hours of 1 and 9 o'clock on Saturday, and I agreed that if the total came to a large amount I would abide by the result. It showed that there was more business done on the Wednesday. Our business is a composite business. We have about a hundred hands employed, and half of the place is closed on Saturday by law, and the consequence is that it has caused great inconvenience if we are dealing with magazines from the Home-country. Some three weeks ago these magazines arrived on a Saturday, and we could not distribute them among the small shops because the other half of the establishment was closed, while other persons in the same business in the town were able to distribute theirs. I think that is a matter which should argue in favour of there being one day fixed for the half-holiday. Another point of great importance is this: When I was in the Old Country I used to visit different towns, and I found that there was very little business done on any other day except market-day. If Monday was the market-day it was the busy day, while Saturday was much the same as any other day in the week. I say that if this Saturday half-holiday were given to us, although it might dislocate business to a certain extent at the start for perhaps a twelvemonth, I am sure that the volume of business would not be interfered with. The employers would very soon adapt themselves to the change, and the employees could be paid on some other day. The shop-assistants form a far larger proportion of the population than the shopkeepers. Here in Wellington there are about two thousand shop-assistants, and there are certainly not two thousand shopkeepers.