

some time ago, that many of the assistants said, "What is the good of joining a union? We are working fifty-two hours a week: if we join a union we shall get the same conditions imposed on us as you had imposed on you in Wellington—an extra thirteen hours a week." Just now there is an agitation in Wellington that the operations of the union should be extended to the country; but many of us are afraid to go to the country for fear the Wellington award will be extended to the country, and, although we may make representations about the fifty-two hours for workers, no more notice will be taken of us than before. There is another point on which we consider the Arbitration Court overrides statute law, and it is a very sore one to members of the union. It affects female as well as male workers within the meaning of the Shops and Offices Act. An award was made covering female workers in restaurants, and if a girl worked more than fifty-two hours in a week the employer was guilty of a breach and was liable to be taken to the Magistrate's Court and fined for it. Now there is provision in our award—although the time for female employees does not exceed fifty-two hours a week—which allows an employer to work a female employee overtime. So far as my memory guides me, there are only thirty or forty hours' overtime a year allowed under the Shops and Offices Act.

5. *Hon. Mr. Millar.*] Ninety hours, I believe?—Ninety, is it? I am not quite certain. Now a female employee, who previously could only work fifty-two hours a week, can work ninety hours a week; she can work as many hours as she likes provided the employer pays her 9d. an hour overtime. The position is this: that, whereas in the first place it was an offence to work a female overtime without getting permission, or in conformity with the Shops and Offices Act, now she can work overtime, and it is only an offence if the overtime is not paid for. A case which occurred a fortnight ago will illustrate the position of hardship. A restaurant-keeper employed a girl from sixty to sixty-two hours a week. I reported the matter. Had there been no award the case would have been heard, and because it was a clear case the employer would have been fined. As it is, the effect of the Shops and Offices Act is altogether destroyed, and the employer can only be prosecuted for not paying the overtime. The case was reported three or four weeks ago, but, as the girl has gone away, it is impossible to get her evidence now. The employer can deny that the overtime was worked, and the case will probably be withdrawn because there is no evidence to support it, and if brought it would probably be dismissed by the Arbitration Court. The members of our union think some provision should be made in the Bill to prevent the Court from usurping powers such as I have illustrated. The Trades Councils' Conference previous to the last one suggested that an amendment should be made in the Bill to prevent the Arbitration Court taking away from the workers rights and privileges already granted, and also to prevent the Court imposing in its awards more hours than are allowed by Act of Parliament; and the opinion of a majority of my union is this: that that provision in the labour laws which says "subject to an award of the Court" was only put in to render it legal to impose less hours than those provided by the Act. For instance, in the Factory Act or Shops and Offices Act an award imposing less than fifty-two hours' work a week would be legal. But we do not think Parliament ever intended that the power should be twisted the other way, so as to impose, as in our case, an extra thirteen hours a week. Neither do we think a girl, merely because a union is formed in the industry, and merely because the principle of the Act has been overridden, should be deprived of benefits that would accrue to her were there no union in existence.

6. *The Chairman.*] You have stated your case with considerable detail, and wish the Bill to be passed in such a form as to prevent what you have referred to happening again?—Yes.

7. And to meet the difficulties you have laid before us?—Yes.

GODFREY POWELL examined. (No. 18.)

1. *The Chairman.*] I understand you wish to give evidence not so much with regard to the Bill before us, as with reference to the permit system and its abuse?—Yes, and the under-rate-paid men in particular.

2. What are you?—A joiner.

3. What is your official position?—District secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners.

4. Have you been deputed by them to give evidence here?—Yes. We have received communications from our branches, which number about twenty-two in the Dominion, to urge upon Parliament the necessity for altering the permit system in some way so as to make it more effective to our tradesmen in the country districts. In the larger towns we have paid secretaries who are able to watch over the system of permit-granting; in many country districts we have no agents, hence the abuse of granting permits.

5. Will you tell us what the present position is?—In country districts where we have no branches the Magistrate is the only person who can grant permits. The Conciliation Boards do not sit in these places, and consequently the Magistrates issue the permits. With permission I will read a letter I received which will explain the position:—

"Department of Labour, Wellington, December 1, 1905.

"G. H. Powell, Esq., Secretary, Wellington Branch, Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners' Industrial Union of Workers, 2 Tutchin Avenue, Wellington.

"DEAR SIR,—

"Mr. Stanford, the Stipendiary Magistrate at Wanganui, finds a difficulty in complying with clause 5 of the Wanganui Carpenters' award of 17th January, 1903. That award requires notice to be given to the secretary of the local union, which is defunct, and notice to you would not be convenient, nor would it comply with the terms of the award. The Magistrate, after conferring with the President of the Arbitration Court, has directed me to ask you, by way of esta-