

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

WEDNESDAY, 28TH SEPTEMBER, 1910.

ELIJAH JOHN CAREY examined. (No 1.)

1 *The Chairman.*] I understand you wish to give evidence on the Shops and Offices Amendment Bill now before the Committee?—Yes.

2 And you represent this morning——?—The Wellington Trades Council, the Auckland Hotel Employees' Union, the Dunedin Hotel Employees' Union, and the Wellington Cooks and Waiters' Union.

3. You have been appointed by those different unions by resolution?—Yes.

4. Well, will you kindly make a statement to the Committee, confining your evidence strictly to the four corners of the Bill that is now under consideration. The Committee have no desire or intention to introduce matter that is not contained in the Bill?—The position that the Council and the unions I represent take up is this. We thought it would have been unnecessary for the Committee to hear any further evidence in connection with the Bill, on account of the large volume of evidence that was tendered by both sides in connection with the same Bill last year. I came along in obedience to the request of yourself to give evidence, and I have not much to say.

5. Not at my request?—Well, at the request of the Committee.

6. No, we simply asked you if you wished to give evidence—we did not request evidence?—The position is this: that if the other side is not going to give evidence, then we will stand aside also. We had a circular to the effect that the Labour Bills Committee was going to take evidence again on the Bill, although we rather hoped that they would decide not to again take evidence, but, seeing that evidence is to be taken, and that the employers will avail themselves of the opportunity to give evidence, I wish on behalf of the people I represent to say something in regard to the Bill. The whole of the unions concerned approve of the main provisions of the Bill with the exception of section 5, which increases the hours for females far and above what is already provided for. The Shops and Offices Act already provides that a certain section of restaurant workers—females—shall only work a maximum of fifty-two hours per week. This Bill provides for fifty-six hours for all females, but because of the general good it is going to do to the general body of workers in the trade we are prepared now to accept a compromise in the hope that the Bill will be put on the statute-book. Section 7 of the Bill, as was made plain, I think, by both sides last time, is not acceptable to the union, nor, I believe, is it acceptable to the employers. That is the proposal to allow the holidays to accumulate by arrangement between the worker and employer. The proposal was put in, in my opinion, because it was sought by the draftsman of the Bill to make provision for exigencies that occur in the hotel trade at race week and during busy weeks. It has happened sometimes in Christchurch and once or twice here in Wellington, when the hotels have been full, that it has been a little inconvenient to give the half-holiday, and I believe this section was put in so as to give some ease to the employers in that direction. Now, the unions are very conciliatory in the matter—they do not object to modification of the Act so long as the principle of the half-holiday is carried out, and I have prepared a substitute for section 7 of the Bill which I think would meet with the wishes of the employers as well as with the wishes of the unions. It is as follows: "Section 7 In lieu of allowing a half-holiday as provided for in section 5, subsection (d), of this Act, the occupier of an hotel may, with the previous written consent of the Inspector of Factories for the district, require all or any of the assistants to work on the day of the half-holiday, provided (a) that the maximum weekly hours provided for in the Act shall not be exceeded, (b) that every assistant who works as required on the half-holiday shall be given a whole day's holiday during the week immediately succeeding the week on which the half-holiday was not allowed; (c) that it shall not be lawful for the Inspector of Factories for the district to consent to allowing assistants to be worked on the half-holiday for more than six times in any one year, or for more than once in any period of two months of any one year." In my opinion, if that were incorporated in the Act it would give employers the privilege of working their men without giving them the half-holiday during Carnival Week in Christchurch and the summer race week here, and at the same time the men would not be deprived of the half-holiday because they would get it added on to the usual half-holiday in the succeeding week. Once or twice, where the exigencies demanded, that arrangement has been arrived at in certain hotels in the past. The Bill provides for sixty hours for males and fifty-six hours for females. Already certain employers have openly boasted to me that they have succeeded in blocking the Bill for the past two years, but they now begin to believe its passage is inevitable. The labour organizations I represent think it is time that New Zealand legislated for the class of workers that this Bill seeks to provide for. In all the States of Australia there is such legislation. In Queensland the Act provides for a working-week of fifty-three hours for the general run of hotel-workers excepting barmen and bar assistants, and they are allowed to work a maximum of sixty hours weekly; in New South Wales for many years the Act has provided for fifty-six hours a week, and in Victoria the hours under the Factory Act are fifty-eight for males and fifty-six for females in hotels. In South Australia there is no legislation governing the working-hours of workers in restaurants and hotels, but the Labour Government there intends to introduce a Bill in October providing for fifty-three hours a week for all employees in hotels and restaurants. In New Zealand we have the Shops and Offices Act,