

25. In your experience, are not the wages fixed on other grounds than the hours of employment? Does not the Arbitration Court take into consideration the conditions of living, and the general status of the class of workers in the community?—Certainly it must take into consideration other conditions, but my point is that they have taken them into consideration without considering the hours that the employers have to work.

26. *Mr Luke.*] I want to get Mr Pryor's opinion definitely in regard to this abuse of the system of keeping shops open after hours. Does he think that could be got over by inserting in the Act that where an owner of premises keeps assistants they must conform to the closing-hours prescribed by statute?—I think it might be got over by providing that only the shops should remain open where the occupier alone is employed in the shop. You have to be careful, because if you leave loopholes there would be ringing in other things. Then you would relieve the widow, and small suburban shopkeeper, and those who depend on the chance trade from the houses round about, and who could not exist otherwise.

27. *Hon. Mr Millar* ] Talking about this last proposal, do you know that at present a great injustice is done to a large number of shopkeepers by their being compelled to close under requisition, whereas others remain open and sell the same stuff?—Yes.

28. Would not the case be met by providing that a borough of, say 5,000 should be closed at a certain hour, but that wherever a requisition has been presented that all shops selling the same article should be closed at the same hour, there could be no hardship in the case of, say, towns of 5,000 or over, because many of them are large enough in business there to afford to store simply the one class of goods?—Would that meet the case?

29. Of course, if a Chinaman sold tobacco he would have to close at the same hour?—We have in Wellington a request from the soft-goods people to close at 8 o'clock—those shops which are run by the employer and the members of the family. We know some cases where members of the family work elsewhere during the day, and still they can remain open until 8 or 9 o'clock.

30. Would not what I suggest get over the trouble?—No, it would not get over the trouble. Those employing labour would still be under the same disadvantages as at present. They could not remain open till the requisition hour because they are prevented from employing their assistants after 6 p.m.

31. Those you mention could not remain open, because they would have to close at a gazetted hour?—Do you propose to gazette an hour?

32. A requisition has to be signed. Once that has been done, every shop stocking certain goods would be compelled to close. If they did not want to come under the Act they would have to cease selling those goods?—That is the exact position to-day. We will take soft-goods people: very possibly it would be quite easy to get the majority of them to close at a certain hour, and if they wanted to keep open later they could not sell the particular goods. We are asking that those who employ assistants should be allowed to employ them up to the time covered by the requisition, so long as they do not do so for more than fifty-two hours, or else the hour of closing should be made compulsory under the Act. You can see that under our proposal the larger shopkeepers would be getting the advantage.

33. *The Chairman.*] Of course, your suggestion would necessitate keeping an extra staff?—It would necessitate some alteration. There are quite a number of soft-goods houses in Wellington, and, I suppose, also in some other places, where they do not work the fifty-two hours now. I do not think, myself, that it is possible to employ assistants under the 8-o'clock closing.

34. *Mr Luke.*] Your suggestion is that we should allow the assistants to work, and employ another assistant, and that would mean employing additional men. I believe in compulsory closing for all shops with the exception of the original owner of the shop who does not employ any labour.

35. *Mr. Hardy* ] I think that one of the most unfair things that ever crept into the Bill was this widow business. How do you account for the fact that in Wellington there seems to be more keeping shops open late than in any other town in the Dominion?—I cannot account for it. I am sure that in Dunedin you would get a majority in favour of 6-o'clock closing, and also in Christchurch. If you propose it in Wellington there is no question but you are going to cause a howl—such a howl that there will be trouble. At the same time something should be done.

36. Are you not of opinion that the widow clause is run to death?—What was in my mind was the really small shopkeepers, who do the whole of their own business in the suburban centres, and really depend for their existence on the cash trade in the evening. You are going to take their living away unless there is some provision for them.

37. To all intents and purposes they do a legitimate trade?—Yes.

JOHN BEVERIDGE examined. (No. 6.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you, Mr Beveridge?—I am president of the Wellington Licensed Victuallers' Association.

2. Has your association considered this Bill?—Yes.

3. And you wish to express their views?—Yes. Mr. Pryor has gone very fully into the question of the amendments we are asking for, and perhaps I had better confine myself to giving an explanation in regard to those particular amendments that we are asking for. The first that concerns the hotels is in section 3, the definition of a shop-assistant. We are asking an exemption for engineers, electricians, and hotel clerks. The reason we do so in the case of engineers and electricians is that they are in charge of certain machinery, and have got to be there when required, and to keep them within the section would be rather hard, but we could not very well do without it. Hotel clerks are practically the same—they have got to be there on the arrival of steamers and trains, and their hours naturally are somewhat erratic. We ask that they should be exempted