

FREDERICK PRIOR examined. (No. 25.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—A restaurateur, in Queen Street, Auckland.

2. Will you please state your views as briefly as possible?—While you are on the half-holiday question I should like to say this: there is a half-holiday book. At the top of the page is the heading, "Name, Occupation, Day of Half-holiday."

3. What clause are you referring to?—Clause 30. Say that Miss Brown, waitress, had her half-day last Wednesday. On this Wednesday circumstances have arisen which make it inconvenient to let this girl off. Can the employer say to her, "Miss Brown, instead of going off to-day you can go off to-morrow." I maintain that an employer cannot do that, and we have been instructed in Auckland that we are not allowed to do it. You certainly have the privilege of fixing the day, but you cannot change it afterwards. Those are the instructions I got, at any rate, from the Auckland Inspector. And not only that, but at a meeting we had last week another restaurant-keeper and confectioner reported that he was distinctly told by the Inspector that he was not allowed to change the day for any of the employees.

4. *Mr. Davey.*] That is under the old law?—I think it is the same in this Bill.

5. But extra provision is made that restaurant-keepers shall give one whole holiday in every week?—As far as the whole holiday is concerned I do not think it is practicable. It is all very well for Mr. Long to criticize what Mr. Whitehead says in regard to chefs, but I maintain that if you have a chef and are running a decent business the second cook cannot take the place of the chef, except it is a very exceptional case. If you give a half-day off the principal part of the work is done when the dinner is finished, because with a good many of the restaurants the midday meal is the principal meal of the day. But if you have a dinner after that it is where the second cook cannot come in, and in such a case I maintain that if you are compelled to give a whole holiday you practically must have two chefs. I should like to mention another matter: I and others in Auckland run business that is practically one-meal-a-day business—that is the midday meal. Sometimes we do a fair tea, and at other times we do scarcely anything. We have under our award been allowed to employ midday waitresses. The hours with them are from 11.30 to 2 o'clock. In the first award that we had provision was made as follows: that the hours should be from 11.30 till 2 o'clock on the six working-days, and that Sunday hours should be fixed by arrangement. Then a clause provided that any work done in excess of the hours specified or outside of the hours prescribed should be paid for at the following rate: Workers receiving £1 10s. or less, 9d. an hour; workers receiving more than £1 10s., time and a half. That award expired in 1910. A new award was sought for, and we asked for the same conditions. In his award the Judge dealt with various things, and he made a memorandum at the bottom in which, when he came to the hours, he stated, "Parliament has stepped in and made an amendment to the Shops and Offices Act which provides for your hours and rate of overtime. The hours of work and rate of overtime for workers coming within the scope of this award are regulated by the Shops Amendment Act, 1910." Now let us suppose the following emergency arose, just by way of illustration: To-day I have three permanent girls in my room off for a half-day. One of the permanent hands has not turned up this morning, and at about half past 1 I get a ring on the telephone that the father of one of the others wants the girl home because her mother has fallen down and sprained her ankle. That leaves me five girls short. If I say to one of these midday waitresses, "Miss Smith, Miss Jones is not here; I want you to come back to serve the tea for two hours," I have to pay her 3s. an hour for it. The union might say, "Well, you could have her all day." We do not want her all day; we have too many there now. All that we ask is that we have the right to employ these girls in any emergency in which we want them. We do not want to make a practice of it. The only time when we utilize them is in an emergency like that, or perhaps at race time. You cannot get casual labour on a race day. Not only that, but it is more convenient for you to run your business with your employees that you know. However good a casual hand might be she is strange. We ask for the privilege of bringing these midday waitresses back, and I think we are justly entitled to it. We have been allowed to do it until about three months ago. We paid these girls for the time we brought them back 1s. an hour. We know that the wages a midday waitress gets are not sufficient to keep a girl, but they help. One of my own midday waitresses is a widow lady with two children. She receives a small compensation payment and lets a room to a couple of girls, and this money that she is able to earn in midday helps her to get a living. Then, other women get hold of a husband who is a "waster" and will not keep them, and they have to fessick out their own living; and I think these people should have the privilege of earning this money, which they are justly entitled to. You cannot employ these particular people all day long, because they are not in a position to accept such a situation. There is another very important thing that I think wants looking into. Clause 46 provides, "All proceedings in respect of offences against this Act shall be taken in a summary way on the information or complaint of an Inspector, and shall be heard before a Magistrate alone." We want tacked on to that, "Provided always that every complaint made to an Inspector must be accompanied by a sworn affidavit as to the facts regarding the said complaint." Our friends at the other end of the room are laughing. I do not know whether they are responsible for sending the departmental officers on wild-goose chases. If they are it is quite time they were stopped. Only about six weeks ago an Inspector from the Labour Department came up to my place at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. He asked for me, and my wife told him I was out. He said, "A complaint has been lodged with the Department about the dirty state of your premises; your kitchen-tables are never scrubbed; your floors have never had a scraper on them." She said, "You can go through and see yourself." He went down and saw the kitchen and came back and said, "I cannot find any fault, and, to tell you the truth, I would not mind having my tea off the tables."