

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

FRIDAY, 1ST AUGUST, 1913.

Mr. Pryor (Secretary, Employers' Federation): If you will permit me, Mr. Chairman, I should like to say that we have three witnesses this morning—Mrs. Black, of the Hotel Bristol, Wellington; Mrs. Davies, of the Hotel Federal, Christchurch; and Mr. Horsley, of the City Buffet, Christchurch. They are private-hotel keepers. Mrs. Davies and Mr. Horsley came up, I think, by arrangement with the Hon. Mr. Fisher, to give their evidence to-day, and Mrs. Black is with them. They are here to give evidence with regard to the Bill as it affects the private-hotel keepers and private-boardinghouse keepers.

Mrs. THOMAS BLACK, Proprietress Hotel Bristol, Wellington, examined. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] We shall be glad to hear what you have to say?—I will give you an idea of how the Bill will affect me if it is passed. It will mean absolute ruination to me. It will cost me £283 a year more to run the hotel, and the hotel will not stand that. The expenditure I have to meet now is really as much as it can stand. The business will not warrant any increase in expenditure. The girls I have now—all the staff—are very well satisfied with the way in which they are treated. I will hand you this document to prove whether they are satisfied or not. I went to each one of the girls and explained to them. I said, "I do not want you to sign this unless you are absolutely satisfied with the way you are treated," and that document shows you what they did. Not one was forced to sign it. With the girls I have now I have one on every afternoon and one on every evening. I am not allowed to keep on any more, so the girls really have quite enough to do. As you know, the cost of living has gone up so enormously that one really could not do more than we are doing—it is utterly impossible for any private-hotel keeper. If the Bill becomes law it just means that we shall all go bankrupt. I have gone through my books and gone into the whole matter, and I find it just means ruination—absolute. There is no hope for it. I could not afford to employ another hand in the place, because the business will not warrant the expenditure. No matter which way we take it, I could not possibly do it. One of the members, I hear, said in the House that the hotelkeepers could put more water in their whisky. We private-hotel keepers have no whisky to water. We have got to make everything from the table, and we cannot make anything to warrant the increased expenditure. As I say, if this is carried it means absolute ruination to every private-hotel keeper and boardinghouse-keeper, no matter in how large or how small a way they may be. As to raising the tariff—well, we cannot get people to pay what we ask now. It would be no use raising the tariff on the boarders, because they will not pay what we ask. When they come in, if they are staying for a week they want a reduction, and if they are staying for a month they want a bigger reduction still. Again, with regard to putting it on to the public, why should the public suffer for a Bill like that? Why should we increase the cost of living, because the cost of living must go up if the Bill is carried? It is quite bad enough now. Within the last month or so every firm that I am dealing with has put up the price of everything. Even if this state of things continues as it is it means closing down. Each of my girls is off every afternoon, excepting one of them. They have from 2 o'clock till 6 every afternoon. My porter has from 2 o'clock till 5 off every afternoon, and one day a week from 2 o'clock, and he comes on the next morning. The same with the cooks. I should just like some of you Committeemen to come along to my hotel and find out for yourselves what they are really doing, the hours they are working, whether they are satisfied or not, and whether they work too hard or not. I assure you that every one in that hotel is perfectly satisfied as things are. The Bill would be of absolutely no use to them. If the Bill were going to be of any use to any of them I would quite agree with it, but I find it will not be of any use to one side or the other. I think that is all I really have to say. It really means closing down if it is carried.

2. *Mr. Okey.*] How many hands do you keep?—Fifteen.

3. How many extra hands do you anticipate you would require under the Bill?—Four more.

4. What is the nature of your trade—do families come and live at your place?—We have some married couples, but we have a number of young men and young women—permanent boarders. Then we cater for the travelling public. My tariff is 6s. a day. We do a very good business, they say; but it takes me all my time to make things run smoothly, because the cost of living has increased so enormously. Where I used to get 5 per cent. discount I now get 2½ per cent. right round. And the price of everything has increased—meat, milk, everything—so much so that if this Bill is carried it means absolute ruination. It would cost me £5 8s. a week more—£283 per annum more to run the business. I have four flats, and when it was one girl's day off I could not get the girl on the flat below to do the two flats. As it is it takes her up to 2 o'clock to do hers. I know that they would not do it to begin with, and I would not expect them. I am not a slave-driver, and I could not afford to employ any other person to do it; so I should have to do it myself. But as it is I have to work hard enough: I am going from half past 6 in the morning till 11 at night. It is an utter impossibility.

5. Do you find that you have many people come to you on Sunday, with the arrival of the boats?—A few; not so many on Sunday as through the week. We might have two or three occasionally on Sunday. We have about forty permanent boarders in the house.