

ROBERT CHARLES HORSLEY, Private-hotel Keeper, Christchurch, examined. (No. 3.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Will you explain to the Committee your views on this Bill?—I came up from Christchurch principally to try to explain the ruinous effect it would have on my business generally. It would absolutely knock the bottom out of the thing. There is hardly enough in it to warrant the worry and trouble of the servant problem now, without going any further into this matter. If we have to give our whole staff a day off it means an increase of the staff. In my case it would run into £250 a year. I am quite prepared for the Government to send a man down to my establishment, and he can stay there and I will pay for him to be there for a fortnight to go through it and watch results, and if he says that my business will warrant the extra expense I am prepared to do what is proposed. But I am sure he would come back and say that it would break me, that it would knock the bottom clean out of the business. At my place I supply meals, and we have very large luncheons on. It is no fool of a cook that will come along to cook dinners for a big number. The proposal in the Bill would mean that I would have to employ another first-class cook. Under ordinary circumstances a first-class cook is a very hard person to get hold of. Even when you have a man who can cook well he is very rarely reliable, and I think nine out of every ten hotel people will assure you of that—that the cook proposition is one of the worst propositions in the whole concern. If we have to let housemaids off for a whole day, how are we as private-hotel keepers to get our beds made in the morning? If the girl on one flat does not turn up one day, the beds are not made up, and we shall simply have to employ another girl for one day. It means that anybody in business as a private-hotel keeper must have a staff of two or three who do not work in the establishment, and I think that is far too big a handicap for any concern. The question has come up, Why do we not raise the tariff? We have already tried to raise the tariff, but we are catering for the general public, and the general public do not care much for it. For example, if I were satisfied that I could get half my people to come in for lunch every day I would put my tariff up to 1s. 6d. (I charge 1s. now for luncheon), but I am quite satisfied I would not get a quarter of them. The result would be that I would not have enough money at the end of the month to pay the rent. I simply cannot afford to do it. It is the bulk of the business that I do at 1s. that enables me to manage. We are not making a lot of money in private hotels. We have no bar. Every man gets value for his money. If he does not we very soon hear about it. A man in a private hotel wants his cup of morning tea, his glass of hot milk at night, and all sorts of things at dinner, and he is charged 6s. a day. I have been in most of the hotels in the North Island, and I am satisfied I am putting on quite as good fare as the majority of places that charge 8s. or 9s. a day in the North Island. Yet I get complaints—"Good life! 6s. a day! How much a week?" That is from the general public. What have we got with which to pay this extra staff? It would absolutely ruin me. I could not stand it. All my staff have signed a statement to the effect that they are perfectly satisfied. [Document produced.] Not only that, but my staff saw me off when I left to come up here, and they bade me "Good luck." They do not want the extra time. This holiday question would absolutely knock the bottom out of everything.

2. *Hon. Mr. Massey.*] How many members have you on your staff?—I think there are nine names on that statement; the night-porter was away.

3. Has there been an increase during the last year or so in the price of the articles of food that you require?—The cost of living has gone up—well, this last nine years, I should say, by 50 per cent. From the business that we used to run there, you could see from the returns that are sent in to the Government every year that there is not one-quarter the profit, and the whole thing is summed up in extra cost of living. It is not extra rent. The rent has increased very little, for the reason that the landlord could not demand any more rent because he knows the bottom of the thing is knocked out. If he said, "I want so-much rent," people would not take over the business. We are on an entirely different basis from a licensed house. In everything that we give to the public they get full value.

4. *Mr. Atmore.*] What rent are you paying?—£34 10s. a month.

5. What articles of consumption have the prices increased on principally?—I cannot tell you one article that has not increased.

6. What are the principal ones?—Meat, bread, butter, eggs, cheese—all the principal articles.

7. Milk?—Milk has increased—everything has increased. All these labour laws are simply putting up wages, and the people put up the price of commodities at the same time. It soon comes back on the consumer.

8. *Mr. Okey.*] You think there would be an objection to raising the tariff? You would have to put your tariff up to 1s. 6d., I suppose?—I have no objection to raising the tariff, but you will always find that the fellow round the corner is prepared to cut in under you, and then you have nothing to pay your rent with. The general public now are not prepared to pay a penny more than they are paying. They go to a given house at 6s. or 7s. a day, and if that house goes up from 7s. to 8s. a day they simply drop down a step to the other house that is charging 1s. less.

9. What class of trade do you get of a Sunday?—We do practically nothing on Sunday—just the boarders in the house. As far as I am concerned, the dining-room is shut on Sunday. It is a private hotel pure and simple on Sunday. My housemaids generally get done at 10 o'clock on Sunday. Another point is this: I see that there is a limit of three employees in the clause. Say there is a big family of half a dozen daughters and a couple of sons to run the business. That is not fair competition with us people who have no family. In my case there is only my wife and myself.

10. *Mr. Veitch.*] I understood you to say that this proposed amendment of the law would increase your expenditure in wages by £250 a year?—I will say between £200 and £250 a year. I have not gone into it closely, but roughly it is over £200.