

will quite understand that it is a very very great hardship indeed. There are a number of small shopkeepers who have been supporting their families who are absolutely ruined. They are only hanging on now at the present moment to see whether anything will be done; if nothing is done they will have to close up and lose their livelihood. I contend that this is not right. You will notice from this circular that we have given you some particulars of the returns of the shops. Some have dropped as much as £500. Speaking for myself, my returns for the month of June showed a decrease of about £120. We were told that we would get our trade back on the Fridays. I have taken the Fridays and Saturdays for the eight weeks, and the difference to me—and I may say that I have a fairly good stand—has dropped from £523 down to £383. Well, gentlemen, that is a very very serious matter. We have not taken as much money on the Friday and Saturday since this Saturday closing came into force as we used to take on the worst Saturday before. Of course, you can quite understand how it is: the people do not come out on the Friday nights. Take the average working-man: when he gets done his work he does not feel inclined to go home and get washed and dressed and come back to the city at night. That is how we lose a good deal of our trade. Then, again, there is another matter in this connection I would like to point out. We have four or five trains running from Swanson, Henderson, Waikumete, New Lynn, Avondale, and Mount Albert to Auckland on Saturday afternoon. Now, as Mr. Bollard knows, it took you all your time to get a seat on those trains in the ordinary way to get to town when the shops were open on Saturday afternoons; in fact, more had to stand than those who got seats. Now, I understand from the Railway Department, it hardly pays to run these trains on Saturday afternoons. In fact (of course, I have not got it officially) I have heard that they are thinking seriously of taking one of the trains off. The majority of these people from Swanson, Henderson, Waikumete, New Lynn, and Avondale used to leave the train at Mount Eden. That is only about a hundred yards from Symonds Street, and they used to do their shopping there on Saturday afternoons. Now you take all this away. Taking it at a small estimate you can reckon that three hundred people come to town in each of these five trains: that is fifteen hundred. I think it would be a very small estimate if you were to say that they had £1 each to spend to do their week-end shopping. Where the trade has gone to we do not know, but, at any rate, we have not got it. The same thing applies on the railway from Papakura. They tell me that the people now do not come down on those trains as they used to on Saturdays. We are thus losing the country trade, and it appears to be diverted into another channel. It means that the large firms get the trade—the large firms like Laidlaw Leeds and other big stores that send goods to the country. Personally I do not think that this is quite a good thing for the community as a whole. It means that, if something is not done, there are hundreds of small shopkeepers who will have to go to the wall. There is not the slightest doubt that if this Saturday closing is kept in force until the end of this year there will be only one consolation, and it is a very hard fact indeed, that we will be able to put up a record in Auckland for bankruptcies, because we will have more this year than in any previous year of the city's existence. Mr. Chairman, I can assure you of that. I do not think there is anything further that I can add. I sincerely hope we will have your entire sympathy in this matter, and that you will give us an opportunity to have another vote taken on the question. At last election, as you know, there were a number of questions on the papers: there was the City Council, the Harbour Board, the Shop-hours Bill, and the Hospital and Charitable Aid Board, all decided on the one day, and it was a pouring wet day. You can quite understand that out of the total number qualified to vote—forty-five thousand—there were only ten thousand who voted in favour of the Saturday half-holiday and six thousand against it, as numbers of ladies, for instance, could not come out on that day. I do not think there is anything further.

3. I suppose you recognize that this poll has been carried by the people. Seeing that the poll has been carried by the people, this Committee can hardly recommend the House to do anything in the matter so far as the Saturday half-holiday is concerned?—Well, sir, I think that the Legislature can do anything if they wish. A great injustice has been done to us, and you have the power to put it right. Take it this way: There are, as I have stated, eight hundred shopkeepers, all of whom are seriously affected by this Saturday closing. I think you can safely say, taking one business with another, that the amount of capital involved represents £800,000; that is only allowing £1,000 for each business. So it can safely be said that you are locking up £800,000 of capital at 1 o'clock on Saturday afternoon, on the day that we can take more money than on any other two or three days. And for what? Simply to please about six hundred shop-assistants. What interest have they in the country? Another reason why we ask the Legislature to give us another opportunity to vote is this: You will know, sir, that the boundaries have been altered during the last few weeks connecting Devonport and Takapuna, through Takapuna being made into a borough; and the shopkeepers in Takapuna and Devonport are now compelled to close just the same as we in the city. Now, there were only ten thousand people in all who voted for the Saturday closing, while in Takapuna and Devonport alone there are twelve thousand on the roll. So I think we are bringing before this Committee a good case to ask the Government or the Legislature to grant us another poll under the circumstances.

4. You are speaking with reference to the petition?—Yes, sir, the petition which is before your Committee. We thought it would be the best way out of the difficulty. We thought the best thing to do would be to get up a petition, and, if the worst came to the worst, we ask that every one should be made to close. If a Saturday half-holiday is wanted, then it should be made universal, and everybody should be compelled to close, including the hotels. I do not see why the Legislature should say to a shopkeeper, "You must lock up your capital at 1 o'clock on Saturday." the best day in the week for us, and allow other people to remain open to do business.

5. *Mr. Davey.*] The Chairman has mentioned to you the difficulty this Committee would find itself in should it endeavour to prompt the Government to alter the existing law. You