

competition and under-cutting, carried on largely by shops run with child-labour. Now, restrictive legislation will stop them, and, therefore, it is fair to the trade all round, and will not embarrass one shop in particular if it is conducted on a sound basis.

*Witness* : I am afraid there is a good deal of that. I am stating a practical fact, and the result is that a large amount of printing, owing to the prices, is being done by various processes in merchant's own offices. We are daily sending out machines for doing this class of printing. A movement to use type-setting machines is now on foot in this colony, and I may say I have been informed that the *Daily Telegraph*, Sydney, has displaced eighty men, and replaced them by sixteen men and these machines, and the excuse made is this very question of wages.

*Hon. Mr. Reeves* : That is the competition of machinery with hand labour. That has been a question long before Labour Bills were introduced.

*Witness* : What has brought on the reduction in Melbourne, which the compositors have to face, to £2 12s. 6d., while we have to pay £3. Is New Zealand not to be affected by these laws?

*Hon. Mr. Reeves* : This is not an Act to keep up the union rates and compositor's wages in the printing trade. That will be settled by the union and the employers; if wages are to be reduced from £3 to £2 10s., they will be reduced irrespective of this Act.

*Witness* : I am not desirous of such a result. I am not at all in favour of low wages; when they are high everything else is brisk. I do not wish to be forced into the position of lowering wages.

*The Chairman* : I think we ought to confine ourselves to the employment question.

*Witness* : This Bill sets up what is practically an eight hours a day limit, or forty-five hours a week; we work at present forty-eight hours. The machines have to be stopped as a rule twenty or thirty minutes before closing-up time, in order to be cleaned and washed; and the result of this Bill would be, that instead of stopping at five o'clock we would have to stop at 4.30. The men and machines would be standing idle. It does not mean forty-five hours a week, it would really mean forty-three, and that is why I say its operation would inevitably tend to a reduction of wages.

*Hon. Mr. Reeves* : That is the eight-hours question which is being fought out all over the English world.

*Witness* : I have no sympathy with the reduction of wages, and am not speaking on the question from that point of view at all. The question for employers is, how are they to exist under these accumulating burdens and restrictions?

*Hon. Mr. Reeves* : I think you will exist. The fiercest competition has taken place in countries where no State restriction had been ever imposed. Speaking generally, and without referring to any one town, you know that half-a-dozen job offices run by more or less insolvent printers do more to injure trade than all the Acts of Parliament ever passed. I know something of printing. If you wish to revive the trade, restrict the methods which at present play into the hands of little rubbishing shops, where a man in a ramshackle establishment employing boys and girls cuts down wages and produces general destruction, until he goes through the Bankruptcy Court; after which his partner, probably, starts again with the old plant in some town or another.

*Witness* : The return on the capital employed is not what it ought to be, considering the current rate of interest.

*Hon. Mr. Reeves* : Of course, that is the result of general causes. We know that in Australia and England they have not made that for the last two years.

15. *The Chairman*.] Can you give us any suggestions connected with the general provisions of the Bill?

*Witness* : I do not think I can. I really did not know what the position of the Bill was. I did not know that it was in this "fluid" state.

*Hon. Mr. Reeves* : Possibly—if I may suggest—the Committee is prepared to take any practical suggestions Mr. Blair might give in writing.

*Witness* : I am sure it wishes to attain better things, and I am in sympathy with it.

*The Chairman* : Our object in taking evidence is to make the Bill as practicable as possible, in order to produce equal benefits to every one, employers and employés.

*Hon. Mr. Reeves* : Hear, hear!

*The Chairman* : You might give some suggestions on these points.

*Hon. Mr. Reeves* : I should be happy to have them, and would move that they be added to the evidence and printed.

*Witness* : I shall be most happy to make some suggestions.

*The Chairman* : We are taking evidence for the purpose of making the Bill as workable as possible. Will you kindly make any suggestions that may, in your opinion, improve the Bill.

ARTHUR SCOULLAR examined.

16. *The Chairman*.] Your name is Arthur Scoullar, of the firm of Scoullar and Chisholm?—Yes.

17. I dare say you have given some consideration to the question of how this Bill could be improved?—I must confess that I came rather to answer any questions you might put to me than to lead you in the matter.

18. But you have formed some idea of the propositions of the Bill?—Yes: I think the Bill, if passed in its present state, will be unworkable. With regard to apprentices, for instance.

19. That is, as it is at present drafted?—Yes; because, in the first place, of the amount of remuneration given to apprentices; that is excessive. My reason for coming to that conclusion is based on a long experience of dealing with apprentices. As you are aware, a boy learning his trade scarcely earns his wages for the first two years. The first year a boy is in a large establishment he is probably employed in cleaning up the shop, running messages, and doing things of that sort, so that really if his wage is at a high figure he is getting more than he is earning; so that I think for