

come on at 5 o'clock and take up another man's work. It simply cannot be done. For steamer repairs there might, perhaps, be only one or two blacksmiths in the whole City of Wellington that can do certain work, one in one shop and one in another, and we simply could not take an inferior hand and put him on this work. We object to the Bill, as I have told you, altogether. We are asked to pay, according to the conditions of the Bill, for thirty-two holidays in the year. Now, we simply cannot do it. That means 12 per cent. extra in wages, and it will simply drive any new work practically out of the country to a very great extent. There is not anything like 12 per cent. in new work, taking it all round; and then the repairing work, of course, will be entirely upset with these hours. So, gentlemen, I must ask that the iron trade should be exempted. You might just as well bring in a Bill limiting the hours of medical men. We are, in our trade, so far as machinery is concerned, exactly in the position of doctors with the human race. It will upset everything. In fact, I never know, as far as late breakdowns coming in are concerned, when I go to work in the morning what will happen during the day. A medical man or a manufacturer can reckon he will do a certain amount in a day, but we never know the moment a job will come in. A little job came in about 5 o'clock last night for the "Star of England," and if I had been prohibited from going on with that work it meant detaining that ship for another twenty-four hours, and incurring a considerable amount of expense. It would have meant delaying His Majesty's mails; and, in short, the whole communication of the country, from the farmer down to an owner of a ship, would be in a state of chaos, and the Bill must act very injuriously to the workers. I might almost say from time immemorial the workers in the engineering trade have been very well protected. I might say they have had all the protection practically that any reasonable men should expect, wherever they worked or whatever it was. It was ten hours in the Old Country in my day. It was time and a quarter for the first two hours, and time and a half after that; and it is the same here to-day. The men are quite capable of taking care of themselves. It is an insult to the intelligence of the worker to imagine that he is such an imbecile that he cannot look after himself. Last year we were extremely busy over this dredging boom. The hands came to us and said, "Look here, we can get so-and-so in Dunedin, but do not want to leave you," and they got their wages up all round, and did not want to go to the Conciliation Board.

Mr. CHARLES M. LUKE examined. (No. 26.)

In reply to the Chairman's invitation to state his views on the Bill before the Committee, Mr. Luke said: I indorse in general terms all that has been said by Mr. Cable, and I would like to set out to this Committee that, whatever may be the fate of the Bill itself, it is exceedingly necessary that the engineering trade should be exempted from the clauses referred to by Mr. Cable. Clause 18, limiting the number of hours to forty-five. Practically that clause means forty-four hours to us. It says, "Subject to the provisions of this Act, a person shall not be employed in or about a factory for more than forty-five hours, excluding meal-times, in any one week; nor for more than eight hours, excluding meal-times, in any one day; nor for more than four hours continuously without an interval of least one hour for dinner." That means five days in the week of eight hours, equal forty hours; and beginning at 8 a.m. on Saturday, and knocking-off at 12 o'clock, means another four hours, equalling forty-four hours. Is it likely the workmen will come back after 1 o'clock to make up the extra hour to make forty-five hours? I want to show what the effect of this will be. It means thirty-two days per year will be given to the men, which, at 10s. per day each, equals £16 per man. In our business last year we employed from 175 to 180 hands, and sometimes as many as 200. Taking an average for the last three or four years, say, we employed about 150 to 200 hands. Say seventy-five were retained at £3 per week of forty-eight hours—which are our present hours—and our week was reduced to forty-four hours at the same rate of pay—viz., £3. Say we paid same for the six holidays provided in the Act, that is equal to thirty-two days per year per man, and at 10s. per day equals £16 per year, or £1,200. Say we pay forty labourers at 7s. per day per man for the thirty-two days, that equals £448; and say we pay sixty lads and apprentices for the thirty-two days each at, say, 3s. per day, that equals £228. Then there are the premises, plant, &c., lying idle for the thirty-two extra days, the capital value of which is, say, £25,000, and that, on a 5-per-cent. basis, equals £125. That means a sum of no less than £2,061, and I do not hesitate to say that the business cannot bear that burden. I am not going to say the business is going to close up. We are accustomed to hear a good deal of that sort of nonsense; but we cannot compete against the imported article upon conditions of that sort. For the last three or four years the two principal items we have been manufacturing have been dredging and dairying machinery, with the exception, of course, of repairs. On dredging and dairying machinery there is a duty of 5 per cent. Practically we are working under free-trade conditions, and I ask you, as reasonable men, to look at what the effect will be on our business, owing to the foreign goods coming into this market. Recently we tendered for a pretty large engine and boiler for a dairy factory; we succeeded in getting the boiler, because it was more costly to come out by way of freight. We lost the order for the engine, and the engine represents nearly two-thirds of the value in labour; the boiler only represents from one-third to one-half of the value in labour. The consequence is that that labour is lost to the colony. So you want to see what the effect of this legislation will be upon an industry competing all the time against the larger concerns at Home, which have a larger amount of labour and the longer hours. I cannot emphasize too strongly the statement by Mr. Cable with regard to these repairs. You will see how inconvenient it would be if we were to be stopped from meeting the requirements of nearly every trade in this colony. You have the sawmiller, who on Saturday at noon may have certain repairs to make, and the engineer has come in to effect these repairs then, so that his mill may go on at 8 o'clock on the Monday morning; and in some instances they have as many as two hundred men depending upon that machinery, and if that work cannot be done on Saturday it would have to wait until the Monday, and the hands could not go on with