

77. I gather from you that the strongest point you seem to emphasize is this: the men themselves would prefer to have the opportunity of making the overtime rather than having two or three gangs working in shifts, because they cannot earn enough money in eight months to keep them during the twelve months?—Yes.

78. Does the argument you brought forward in connection with the arrival of sheep and perishable products equally apply to people receiving pelts, and that they have to receive those pelts and deal with them immediately?—Yes. The Woolston people get their pelts down in the evening, and the railway tender them, and do the shunting between 10 p.m. and midnight, and the people who receive those pelts have to keep men there to take them out of the train, so that they will have them in the morning.

Mr. WALTER HILL, Fellmonger (representing all tanners and fellmongers in the Christchurch District), Woolston, examined. (No. 5.)

*Mr. Hill:* With regard to the forty-eight hours, we contend that it is not possible to run a fellmongery or a wool-scouring business at certain seasons of the year in forty-eight hours. We are closely allied to the freezing industry, and our business must be run on very similar lines. Our goods are perishable to a very great extent, and, seeing that we get both skins and pelts from the freezing companies, these things must be dealt with, and if we are penalised for overtime it will seriously handicap us, and, of course, make our goods cost more money. The conditions of labour with us should be practically the same as they are with the freezing companies. If penalties are imposed in the way of shorter hours and increased rates for overtime—of course, our competition will be entirely shut out so far as the farmer goes. We shall not be able to compete for his skins, as all these extra demands will mean something like an increase of from 10 to 12 per cent. on our wages-sheet, and we cannot afford then to work the skins; it will result in a loss on the skins by reducing competition, and some £20,000 or £30,000 spent in wages in this direction will be lost to the workers entirely. With this increase, of course, we should not be able to work. Owing to this penalisation we would probably buy at a nominal rate and ship to London in a dried state. Some of us would be compelled to stop on in the trade, but we should not be employing the labour we are doing to-day. The works would be only partially employed during the rush of the season, which in the busiest time is from November to April. I am dealing with fellmongering, which has its busy and slack times, the same as the freezing companies—we are busy when the freezing companies are busy. With fellmongering our busy and slack seasons are more in accordance with the freezing companies. When they are freezing and shipping we are likely to get a lot of skins, and we can only get skins from the freezing-works after they have killed the sheep. I have skins sent from Belfast, and get them at Woolston at all hours up to 11.30 p.m. The Railway Department cannot push them along, because the trains bringing some of them have to wait for the shunting, and, being boat trains, cannot be delayed. They must be dealt with, and if left in the trucks all night the pelts would be worth next to nothing in the morning. We should lose a big percentage, too, in wool. I have men who do not complain to go and do this, because it finds them in work the next day. If we are compelled to work the forty-five hours, as this Bill proposes, I do not see how we could possibly do it if men are not allowed to work overtime, and it is practically illegal to work overtime under this Bill. And if we have to make application to an Inspector to be allowed to work, it is impracticable—we often do not know an hour beforehand that we shall require these men—and if we have to stop at 1 o'clock on Saturday, that would mean that there are some parts of our business which we could not work on Saturdays. We should have to let Saturday slide; also because there are a number of our men who could not work on the Monday because the other men did not work on the Saturday. It would practically break up the routine of our business. If we saw a decent margin of profit we might put on a rush of men—That is not a satisfactory state of things. It has always been my endeavour to get the men to do the work within the regulated number of hours. I have never had a complaint about working overtime. Then, with regard to wool-scouring, the season for wool-scouring is in the months November to March. We are dependent on the shearing. After wool is shorn we begin to buy wool for scouring. Then the men must avail themselves of every hour of fine weather, no matter whether it is morning or evening, and if they do not do this, and they are compelled to roll up the sheets—and there are often times when an hour in the morning is the best hour of the day—our drying would be delayed, and consequently increased and a less quantity put through—it would be a loss to the worker. On Saturdays it would not be worth the wool-scourers while opening up the sheets—that is in nine Saturdays out of ten. It would considerably increase the cost of scouring, if it is possible to do it, and the margin between scouring the wool here and shipping it in its greasy state is not sufficient to allow of any increase whatever. Those people getting perhaps 1d. per pound for scouring could not possibly get 1½d. if this Bill came into force. Consequently, all that labour would be lost, and the wool would be shipped in the greasy state. I am speaking from a local buyer's point of view. From a foreign buyer's point of view it might be an advantage if you shut up every wool-scouring place in New Zealand. I have bought from ten to twenty-five thousand bales of wool in a year. I scour, of greasy wool, from one to two thousand bales. I do not improve the wool by scouring. I could ship it in the grease without any detriment to it; but these one to two thousand bales I have been scouring are in a very dirty condition. With regard to the dirty wool, by taking out the dirt the saving in freight has enabled me to pay a scouring-wage. In many tests I have tried it has cost me more to scour the wool than I have saved on freight. On the other hand, it has enabled me to buy wool which, if not scoured, I should have been unable to touch.

79. *Mr. Hardy.*] The farmers can sell their clean wool, and sell the dirty wool as well?—Yes. It does not matter which way you take it, the farmer has got to pay it. If I buy a skin and you penalise me I will take it out of the man who has got the skin to sell, or I will not do the business. You do not expect me to come here and bring money and throw it away. I have got to see a result or I do not come. I dare say I could prove, if necessary, that I come here and pay a price