

trict. A very large proportion of the farmers do their business on Saturday, and it would be very inconvenient to them if the shops were closed on Saturday. You may say they could come in on another day. That is quite true; but the point that I would wish to call your attention to is the effect of Saturday closing on the working-class of Masterton, and no doubt the same applies to other country towns. I have made careful inquiries, and find that on an average a hundred and fifty working-men work outside of the town during the week. It has been said, "Well, let them be paid on the Friday." Take these men, working, on an average, from seven to ten miles outside of the town, and suppose they are paid on the Friday. They come into the places in the town where the employers are and receive their cheques, and, supposing the shops are open, they do their business. Are these men to go off to work the half-day on Saturday forenoon? It would be most prejudicial to them; in fact, it would be thoroughly impracticable in a country district, and I trust you will see the force of what I say. These men would require to come in to get their cheques, and supposing the time they would have were limited to 9 o'clock on Friday night, they could not possibly do their business. You could not expect working-men to go back seven and eight miles to sawmills, road-work, fencing, and all that kind of thing and do their half-day on Saturday and return again on Saturday afternoon to town, where their family reside. Then, there are about sixty men who live in the town and work in the country. I refer now to married men. They come in on the Saturday half-holiday, as it is termed now, get their wages, do their business, and spend the Sunday with their family, and go back to work on Monday morning. They could not do that if the half-holiday for shops was on Saturday. Mr. Daniells, the largest employer of labour in Masterton, made an honest effort to have Saturday. He had the conviction that the Saturday half-holiday would work. He tried it for twelve months, and it was a complete failure, and he was obliged to go back to the old system.

4. *Mr. Taylor.*] What is his business?—He is a large ironmonger, timber-merchant, builder, and sawmiller, and has an average of fifty men working for him. That, I think, is a matter for your very grave consideration. As I said before, it would be a very great hardship on the working-men if Saturday were fixed for the half-holiday. We are a democratic people, and I trust you will consider their interest apart from those we represent. Then, there is another matter: I refer to overtime. I think the gentlemen here present will corroborate my statement when I say that it is general in most shops to give the men a holiday every year without deducting anything from their wages. No wages are deducted for illness. We have nineteen employed altogether at our place. I asked them the other day, "Which would you rather have?" They answered, "Certainly the system we are under now." I then asked, "Which would be the best?" They replied, "The present system by far and away." Of course, if we pay overtime we shall not pay them for casual illness, and we shall not pay for holidays. The shopkeepers will thereby save a considerable amount a year, so that it is from no selfish motive that they oppose the payment of overtime. It in no way affects us. We oppose it in the interests of our employees—in the positive interests of our employees, as well as on the ground of disadvantage to others. There is one other point that I wish to refer to. On page 7 of the Bill it says, "No requisition shall be acted upon by the Minister unless the City or Borough Council has certified that the signatures to the requisition represent the occupiers of not less than three-fifths of all the shops within the borough." You see, gentlemen, that this puts it into the hands of those who employ no labour at all to fix the day. We respectfully suggest that if the Bill is passed it should read, "Occupiers of shops who employ three-fifths of the employees." You see the point. A man who has no employees at all can go in for any day, and those who employ a number of men are entirely at the mercy of those who have no employees.

*The Chairman* (to Mr. Allan): Have you anything that you would like to add to what has been said, Mr. Allan?

*Mr. Allan*: No, sir, I have nothing to add. I have only to thank the Committee for the patient hearing they have given to us. We hope that they will pay attention to the suggestions made by the members of this deputation. We feel certain that we are not asking for anything the granting of which would be a hardship to any one.

WILLIAM CONGREVE examined. (No. 7.)

*Mr. Congreve*: Mr. Chairman and gentlemen,—I have the honour to represent the large majority of the retail shopkeepers of Christchurch, and also the large majority of the residents of Christchurch, *re* this Saturday half-holiday. The Wellington deputation have gone so fully into this matter that I feel I should not be justified in wasting one moment of your time. The deputation from Christchurch, I think, fully indorse all that has been said by the gentlemen who have just spoken, so that without taking up your time further I would just like to read the reasons why we feel that the fixing of the day for the half-holiday should be left to the discretion of the people who at present have the electing of the day for the half-holiday. If it cannot be left to the discretion of these people, then by all means have a *plébiscite* of the people in each district taken, and let the people in the country themselves say what they will have. Do not let Parliament fix a day and say to the shopkeepers, "We will ruin one-half of you." That is what it really means. These are our reasons: "(1.) That Wednesday is a more suitable and convenient day for the half-holiday than Saturday, both for buyers and sellers; that it constitutes an agreeable break in the middle of the week, which is greatly appreciated by all tradesmen and their assistants; that Saturday is the one day in the week that could not be made a universal closing-day; (2.) That it is a great convenience to country people who desire to do business in town to be able to do their shopping on a Saturday; that there is more retail trade done in Christchurch on Saturday than on any other three days in the week combined. (3.) That a large percentage of this trade would be lost or diverted in another direction if a day other than Saturday were chosen for the market-day. (4.) That artisans, labourers, and factory-hands have their half-holiday on Saturday—hence if the retailers were closed