

*Mr. McFarlane* : No ; my brother is, but he has not been able to come here.

*The Chairman* : Will you make any statement you wish to make ?

*Mr. McFarlane* : The first point we wish to bring under the notice of the Committee is the provision for the Saturday half-holiday—the closing of shops at 1 o'clock on Saturday afternoons ; and, secondly, the compulsory closing of all shops at 6 o'clock on four days in the week. We now close at 6 o'clock, and we are in favor of making it compulsory for all shops to be closed at 6 o'clock. With regard to the Saturday half-holiday, we are not in favour of it. It would be a great loss to all traders in our city. They would be very much affected by it. I have not been much connected with the association, and with these few opening remarks I will leave it to the other members of the deputation to say what they think fit.

*Mr. Millar* : We are a deputation representing the Dunedin Master Grocers' Association. We represent about thirty shops in Dunedin, and we have been asked to come here and protest against the Saturday half-holiday. Our principal reason for doing so is that on one occasion we tried Saturday-afternoon closing for about six or eight months, and we found that a great deal of trade which used to come to Dunedin before that never reached there during that time. Consequently our takings were much less. One reason for remaining open is that it is recognised in Dunedin that Saturday is the pay-day for the working-classes. If we have to close at 1 o'clock on Saturday we cannot expect our customers to come and pay their accounts on that day, and we cannot expect them to come and pay on Monday when they are busy with other matters. Therefore we think it is advisable to allow shops to be open on Saturday afternoons. Another reason is that there are very many people who come into Dunedin from Port Chalmers, Waikouaiti, and other places on Saturdays to do their shopping, and if we had to close on that afternoon these people would not come in. We are in favour of closing for half a day on one day in the week, and would suggest that that day should be either Thursday or Wednesday. There is another reason against closing on Saturday afternoon, and it is that those who receive their pay on that day might spend it in hotels, and this money would not be available for paying their butchers and grocers and other tradesmen for the supply of goods to their houses. With reference to compulsory closing at 6 o'clock on four other days in the week, we know that there is a growing tendency, even in some of the larger shops, to keep open until 8 or 9 o'clock. The employer goes to his tea at 5 o'clock and comes back at 6 and allows his assistants to go away, but the shop remains open until 8 or 9 o'clock. We find that this practice is growing in respect to many shops at the north end of the town. There are a number of shops open until 8 or 9 o'clock. We think it is absolutely necessary that it should be provided that all shops shall close at 6 o'clock, otherwise those who now close voluntarily at 6 o'clock will have to remain open later in order to protect their own interests. There is one other point that I should like to touch upon, and that is with regard to obtaining permission to work overtime. It is perhaps of not very much importance, but still there may be occasions on which we should have to get permission when it would be very inconvenient. For instance, a carter may have to set off with a load at 5 o'clock and may not return till 8 o'clock. How would it be possible in such a case to get permission for the man to work overtime ? We do our best to finish work at 6 o'clock, but there are cases of emergency when we require to bring the men back after tea. We should have to get permission to do so, and at that time it would be very difficult to find the Inspector. Another point is that we think we should be allowed to work under the award of the Arbitration Court. We have that award, and we think that should govern the arrangement of our business. I do not think there are any other points which I wish to bring under the notice of the Committee.

*Mr. Wardell* : There are a few little matters in the Bill which I should like to refer to, such, for example, as having to get a letter from the Inspector before you can work overtime. I think that is a provision which it would be very difficult to carry out. Then, with regard to the Arbitration Court, I suppose it is the case that the Arbitration Court award overrides the Act ; but, at the same time, if the Act made certain provision the Arbitration Court possibly would not care to differ from it. The Arbitration Court has been set up to adjudicate on the special things in regard to the different trades, and I think where there is an award of that Court it should be left as it is to settle all questions with respect to wages, hours of working, overtime, and so on. I understand that a great many assistants object to the payment of overtime, because they know they would lose more by insisting upon that payment than they would gain. In regard to the grocers' business, there is an overtime award, but there is a certain amount of overtime allowed without payment ; but this Bill would do away with that. I should like to see it left to the Arbitration Court to fix the hours of work, the wages, and overtime, as they do at present. Another point in the Bill is that there are to be only fifty-two hours a week for the men. That would cause us to close at 9 o'clock on Saturday night. At present we have fifty-three hours in our award by the Arbitration Court, and that enables us to keep open until 10 o'clock. If you close us up at 1 o'clock on Saturday afternoon, then we should have to keep open until 9 o'clock on Friday night ; and the working-people coming off work at 5 o'clock and having to get their tea would not get out again until 7 o'clock, and then have to get home again early to be able to start work next morning, so that they would not have much time to do their shopping. Then, again, if there is to be this Saturday half-holiday, there should be no exemptions. The Dunedin Retailers' Association has passed a resolution asking that there shall be no exemptions. The hotels and every other place should be closed on Saturday afternoon if it is to be made the half-holiday. I would also point out that in Dunedin there has been no agitation on the subject of the half-holiday. I believe that the assistants there realise that if it is carried out they will lose by it. They realise that if the trade loses they must lose also. Could you not put Wednesday in the Bill for the half-holiday, putting in a clause also allowing those to close on Saturday who wish to do so ? It would enable some shops to take half-holiday on one day and others on the other. At present some shops take the half-holiday on one day