

55. The interested people would turn up and vote, would they not?—Is it a question that it is worth while taking a vote upon? Storekeepers are very much interested, because it is a matter of “£ s. d.” with them; and if you went round among the people with two petitions they might sign one or the other, but if you ask them to go away to some distant place and vote they will not do it.

56. If a certain day, say, Saturday, were fixed for closing, do you think that the people would consume less tea and sugar and other necessaries of life?—Of course, we do not know how the thing would work if it were made general. We closed in Dunedin for nearly twelve months—not only six or eight months, as Mr. Miller said—and the people were very glad to go back to the old hours.

57. Did the people purchase less butter and tea and sugar when you closed on the Saturday afternoon?—I cannot say that they did; but instead of a certain number of people coming in from Port Chalmers and Waikouaiti and other country places they did not come.

58. Then, it is a question of the Saturday closing driving a certain amount of business out of the town?—That is so; but, I ask, is Parliament justified in interfering with the ordinary flow of business?

59. Then, really your objection is a trade objection, because if the business was leaving your shop it was going to another?—That is so. There is no doubt about that.

60. *Mr. Tanner.*] With regard to this experiment of closing in Dunedin for about twelve months, I would call attention to the fact that Mr. Wardell said the closing took place when the agitation began, and Mr. McFarlane said that customers asked travellers whether they closed on Saturday, and, if not, they would go elsewhere. Does not that show that there is a popular desire for Saturday closing?—Yes.

61. Then the shops were forced into it by popular feeling?—Yes.

62. You say that when the experiment ceased the working-people were satisfied to go back to the old hours?—There was a feeling of sentiment that it was desirable that there should be closing for the half-holiday on Saturday, but we all agreed that it did not work well for either the shopkeepers or the public.

63. Was that experiment general?—No.

64. It was a limited experiment?—Yes.

65. *Mr. Kirkbride.*] Has the present system of closing given satisfaction?—Yes.

66. Has there been any alteration on the part of the local bodies?—No.

67. You, as shopkeepers, have been satisfied with the fixing of the half-holiday by the local body?—Yes.

68. You wish that on other days all shops should have to close at 6 o'clock?—Yes; we think that is only fair when there are so many restrictions placed upon us. We are at present obliged to work not more than fifty-two hours a week, and we do not see why other shops should be allowed to keep longer hours.

*Mr. Miller:* I would ask why should not the small shopkeepers close at 6 o'clock? If you look at the merchants' books you will find that a number of these small shopkeepers do not pay 20s. in the pound. Why should we be compelled to close at 6 o'clock when they can keep open till 9 or 10, as they do in Dunedin? Some of them are in the hands of the merchants, and are only carrying on for a short time, and then they give up and close their doors.

*Mr. Kirkbride:* I asked my question because I know that there are many small shops in Auckland where poor women can do their trade at night, and it appears to me unwise to compel these shops to close at an early hour. Another question I would ask you is: do you recognise that it is one of the pleasures of the half-holiday that a working-man and his wife can go shopping together?

*Mr. Miller:* Yes.

69. *The Chairman.*] I understand the deputation to say they would be in favour of a compulsory half-holiday by Act of Parliament if that half-holiday were fixed for Wednesday or Thursday?—Yes.

70. I understand also that, in answer to Mr. Ell, the deputation are quite clear that, while they are opposed to Saturday being fixed as the half-holiday, they would be quite satisfied to leave the question to be determined by the voice of the people in the specified district?—You know what a difficulty there is in getting a vote of the people in such a case.

71. But if we could get over that difficulty?—Then we should have no objection to the people voting.

72. *Mr. Aitken.*] The deputation have said that they would like to see all shops closed at 6 o'clock on four days in the week, and that there should be a universal closing on the half-holiday; but under the present Act the shopkeeper who does not employ an assistant can close on any day. Would not that be taking away one of their privileges?—That is a matter for the Inspector to decide. We know that at present there are many shops which keep open at the north end when we have to close at 6 o'clock.

73. Is not your contention carried on on the same principle of selfishness that has characterized your other arguments?—Well, I suppose it is a system of selfishness all through. We employ assistants, and have to pay them. If a man has been working during the day, and when he goes home helps his wife to keep the shop open until all hours, is he not to be considered an assistant? I do not think we are the only ones who show selfishness in the matter.

FRIDAY, 14TH AUGUST, 1903.

Mrs. JACOBSEN in attendance and examined. (No. 16.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You desired to make some statement to the Committee with regard to the Shops and Offices Bill which we are now considering. Will you kindly state to the Committee