

here. I find the opinion exists amongst a great number of shopkeepers that they should not be compelled to close when hotels and publichouses are allowed to remain open. The result of that compulsion will be that people will be unable to obtain the necessaries of life, but if the publichouses are allowed to remain open they will be able to spend their money on what is not a necessity. Here is another little matter which will show what the people of Auckland think of the result of such legislation: A meeting of the shop-assistants was held on Monday, the 3rd August, in favour of Saturday closing. The report in the paper puts it in this way—that the meeting was called by a large advertisement, and the citizens were supposed to be there in large numbers, but the result was that there were about a hundred persons present, and by them a resolution was carried that Saturday was the most desirable day for the half-holiday. This resolution was carried by ten holding up their hands in favour of it and six against it. You will find that in the report of the *Star* of the 3rd August. I do not know that I have anything more to say. I have said that I would not take up your time more than was necessary, and I have now only to repeat that this Saturday closing will not affect the larger establishments, some of which already close on the Saturday afternoon. But there is this most important feature: that the small shopkeepers look upon it that this legislation is going to squeeze them out of the business, because half of the business they do is done on Saturday, and they must be ruined if they are compelled to close. I trust you will give these matters your careful consideration.

102. *Mr. Witheford.*] Were you, Mr. French, in business in Auckland when the Saturday-afternoon closing commenced?—Yes, I was; and a great many persons refused to close, and the consequence was that it broke down.

103. If the Saturday half-holiday were made universal would it be better?—I am quite sure that it would be unsatisfactory. Then there is this point, which should not be overlooked, and that is that the Wednesday half-holiday is beneficial to both the traders and the assistants, because it has not been preceded by a late night, whereas if you have a compulsory half-holiday on the Saturday there will necessarily be a late night on the Friday, and the assistants will be kept very busy both then and on the Saturday morning, and that will take away a great deal of the joy from their half-holiday. I may say that I have taken a great interest in this matter for years. I was one of the first to agitate in regard to it, and I was secretary to the shop-hours agitation in Auckland. As secretary to the committee, I found that the buyers were very much opposed to the Saturday closing.

104. Are you aware of the opinion of the Auckland shop-assistants in regard to the matter?—Of course, they would pray for the Saturday half-holiday; but Mr. Bollard knows that there are men in Onehunga who signed for the compulsory closing on Saturday during the agitation but who now want the Wednesday closing and not the Saturday closing.

105. *Mr. Bollard.*] Have you any idea of how many shops there are in Auckland and the suburbs?—I have no idea; but I can say this—that in our canvass we took in Auckland, Parnell, and Newmarket, and we got 669 signatures.

106. Does that include the whole of those who are in favour of the Wednesday half-holiday?—Those in favour of it being optional. In Auckland there is a custom which, I believe, does not obtain elsewhere—that for many years the large retailers close on Saturday.

107. It has been stated to this Committee that as a set-off against the Wednesday closing and the making of Saturday the half-holiday the returns to the people interested would be the same. That is to say, that if the shopkeepers did not get the money on one day they would get it on another—that the volume of trade would be the same?—Of course the volume of trade would be the same, but it would be distributed in a different way. It would dislocate trade very much indeed. For instance, the butchers would not care to have to close on the Saturday, and there are the bakers. People must get their bread on the Saturday, as they have the Sunday before them.

108. It has also been stated to the Committee that although the Saturday might be considered the natural half-holiday, still, if it were made compulsory it would be the ruin of the small shopkeepers. Do you think that that would be the case?—My impression is that it would be ruinous to the small shopkeepers. The small trader does nearly half his weekly business on the Saturday, and if he lost that it would mean ruin to him.

109. It has been also stated to the Committee that the country people do not come into town on the Saturday afternoon. Is that your experience?—If the Committee were to get a return from the Railway Department of the number of persons carried on the railways on the Saturday afternoon they would find that hundreds of persons do come into town on that day with their wives and families.

110. You know, as a matter of fact, that within a radius of ten miles thousands do come in on the Saturday?—Yes.

111. And the fact of the large shops in Queen Street being closed on the Saturday would give that trade to the small shops?—Yes.

112. Does that include the small retailers in Queen Street who now keep open on Saturday?—Yes. There has been a petition sent here in favour of closing on Saturday, but that has been signed by a number of persons who are not so directly interested in the trade. I believe it has been signed by young fellows who are not more than eighteen and a half years of age, but who will be old enough to vote at the next general election, whereas our petition has been signed by shopkeepers alone. There are fifty of the shopkeepers in Queen Street who have signed it.

113. I understand you to mean that those fifty are in favour of continuance of the present system?—Yes.

114. And those who have signed the other petition are not shopkeepers, but merely youths of eighteen years of age?—Some of them are. I do not say that they all are.

115. *Mr. Davey.*] Do you not think that if you had the Saturday half-holiday there would still be the same volume of trade?—Possibly so.