

before you so fully the nature of the relations existing between the employees and employers in law offices that it only remains for me to indorse the opinions which they have expressed. I need only give you my own personal experience as proof that the statements they have made are true. I have had five years' experience in Wellington in a lawyer's office, and I can say that the relations between my employers and myself have always been of a most cordial nature. As you, of course, know, in most of the legal offices in Wellington a great proportion of the employees are aspirants to the legal profession. It is not like other businesses and trades, because the employees in lawyers' offices know that while they are working for their employers they are also working for themselves, and are gaining experience which will be of great use to them in their profession in after-life. In the office in which I am engaged there are fourteen or fifteen clerks, and I believe that ten or eleven of them are studying to ultimately become members of the profession. Speaking of the generosity of the employers to the employees, I may say that the employers recognise that the employees are desirous of entering the profession. As you are aware, the examinations take place in November, and some time before that the employer will call you in and tell you that if you want to prepare for the examination you can arrange with another clerk, so that he may have the mornings off and you the afternoons, so as to give you as much time as possible to prepare for your examination. A whole week's holiday is given previous to the examination. Then, while the examinations are proceeding (and this is for a period of a week or more) you are not required to go near your office, but you are paid all the same as if you were there the whole time. I think that is evidence that the relations between the employers and the employees in lawyers' offices are of a most cordial nature. With regard to the overtime, I can only say that a certain amount of overtime is necessary in preparing cases for the Court. In the case which Mr. Linklater has mentioned it was I who supervised the printing of the documents, and I gained considerable experience by it. We had twelve compositors engaged for several days in printing the copy, and we had to read and correct the proofs for them. It was absolutely necessary to work overtime on that case, for had this not been done it would have been impossible to have had this case printed in time for the sitting of the Court of Appeal. For this work we received substantial remuneration. I respectfully submit that the passing of an Act by Parliament should be to remedy some evil which exists, and we say that law clerks are not labouring under any hardship, and no evil which requires to be remedied exists so far as they are concerned.

Statement by J. J. McGRATH.

I am employed in the office of Messrs. Young and Tripe. I represent the clerks there. There are six clerks besides myself, and we are all law-students. The only thing I can say with regard to the Bill, in addition to what has already been said, is that we think the Government quite accidentally included us in the provisions of the Bill. I do not think for a moment that they had any idea that we should be included. We assume that the intention of the Government is to remedy an existing evil, and we say that as far as we are concerned there is no evil to remedy. I have had ten years' experience of solicitors and law clerks, six years and a half in the Government service and three years and a half with Messrs. Young and Tripe. In the Government service I was employed in the Native Land Court, and the principal persons who did business there were solicitors and law clerks. During my six years and a half's experience I never met a law clerk who had not as much time to spare as any Government clerk had. If the Committee think that our employers work us like draught horses they are very much mistaken. We start work at 9.30 in the morning and work to 5 in the afternoon, with an hour off for lunch, and a half-holiday on Saturdays; and if members of Parliament, passing by law offices in the evenings and seeing the lights burning there, say, "Here are those poor law clerks being sweated again by their employers," they are under a misapprehension. It is more than likely that the clerks (who have the privilege, without any charge, of using their principals' offices, gas-fires, and libraries at night) are in the offices studying for their examinations, or a clerk may even drop in on any private business. I do not think there is a law clerk in Wellington who is not well paid for the little work he does after 5 o'clock. A man from the country or Australia, or even from Home, may come into his solicitor's office—and, in fact, he very often does—and wants his deeds or other legal documents prepared, so that he may get away by steamer or train at the earliest moment. A principal says to his clerk, "This must be done by a certain time," and if it is not done by the time the client wants it he will go somewhere else where he can get it done. When law clerks go back to do work of this kind in overtime they get 6d. a folio for doing it, and this means at the rate of 4s. an hour for them; and their only regret is that they do not get more of it. Nobody in our office has any complaint to make against the present arrangement; and, as far as I am concerned, I may say that I am much better treated, both as regards payment and hours of work, than I was in the Government service, for there I got only £100 a year after six years and a half's service, and my present employers pay me nearly three times that amount. The principal objection law clerks have to the Bill is that they have not asked for it, and that they do not want it. When they have a grievance which requires remedying by Parliament they will invoke the assistance of Parliament just as quickly as any other body of men. I do not think there is one clerk in Wellington who will say that he wants to be turned out of his office at 5 o'clock, and that he is to get only 1s. an hour if he works overtime. We are doing very well at present, and are satisfied to be left alone. As to our hours of work, no law clerk in Wellington can complain; besides the statutory holidays, he gets a holiday for almost any event in connection with football, cricket, or racing—in fact, every time the Mayor proclaims one. Then, again, a law clerk gets off from work, by an arrangement with the other clerks in the office, for six or seven weeks before an examination comes on, and his principal says to him, "If there is anything not urgent to be done leave it over, and you get away as much as you can to prepare for your examination." Treatment such as this is exceptional, and deserves recognition by the law clerks. We are now treated very decently indeed by our employers, and I hope the Committee will induce Parliament to leave us alone and be unanimous in putting a clause in the Bill to exempt us from its operation.