

## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

THURSDAY, 12TH JULY, 1900.

Mr. P. HERCUS in attendance and examined. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Mr. Hercus, I understand you desire to give evidence in connection with this Bill?—Yes, sir.

2. You represent the Canterbury manufacturers, do you not?—Yes, the Canterbury branch of the New Zealand Cloth Manufacturers' Association.

3. I may say, Mr. Hercus, that we intend to take all the evidence in regard to the new matter contained in this Bill. There are certain exceptional powers granted. The power of the Arbitration Court is extended and the Board's power is increased. These are the principal things. The whole of the amendments which require evidence are contained in the interpretation clauses?—The evidence that I wish to give is principally in connection with the colonial nature of the awards. In regard to subsection (3), clause 86, I should like to know clearly if this decides the question of giving the Court power to make the awards universal throughout the colony: that is, in regard to industries which manufacture goods that are interchangeable throughout the colony. In one sense it would almost read as if it did, but reading between the lines it seems that it does not.

4. *Captain Russell.*] What do you mean by "interchangeable"?—Goods that are freely sold wholesale in different parts of the colony. For instance, I should not consider the business of a carpenter or a painter interchangeable. But where boots are manufactured and sold wholesale throughout the colony, where clothing is manufactured and sold in the same way, these are goods I should consider to be interchangeable.

5. *Mr. Laurenson.*] You wish that the award of the Court should apply to every industry of that nature throughout the colony?—Yes. Otherwise we are brought face to face with the competition of other centres whose conditions of labour are very different to ours. What we desire is that the different centres of the colony should be placed on an equal footing; that is all we ask.

6. *The Chairman.*] Is that the only clause you desire to give evidence on, Mr. Hercus?—That is the principal one, Mr. Chairman. Of course I do not know whether this Committee, in regarding this subsection (3), think it meets the case to which I refer.

7. Your desire is that, if the clause does not do so, it should be so amended that it will meet the case?—Yes.

8. *Mr. Lewis.*] Wherein does it appear to fall short?—I may say that my interpretation of that clause has been considerably affected by the reply which the Premier gave to a deputation of master painters which waited upon him in Wellington regarding this Act. The Premier is reported to have said that he did not think it possible to have this amendment made, and he recognised that the law was defective as it did not make provision for the formation of unions in small places, so as to bring those in outlying districts under the operation of the awards. I take it that this subsection (3) is intended to apply to matters of a provincial nature, and not affecting small districts. We would like this subsection (3) amended so that it will provide that industrial awards affecting industries where the goods are interchangeable should obtain throughout the colony. Should I be in order in referring to the case which has been held before the Arbitration Court in Dunedin?

9. *The Chairman.*] Yes, in anything bearing on this clause, or any other clause of the new matter—I suppose the Committee are aware that the clothing manufacturers of Dunedin, Christchurch, and Wellington have banded together into a Federated Association of Employers, and that the unions of those three centres have federated also. We have been before the Conciliation Board in Dunedin and before the Arbitration Court over the question of Auckland competition in the clothing trade. An industrial award has been filed in Auckland in the clothing trade, in which the statement of wages is considerably below the statement of wages in the other centres of the colony. The unions in the South are endeavouring to bind us under an industrial award to pay a certain rate of wages which is considerably higher than what obtains in Auckland. We are feeling the competition that is obtaining. We wish that uniformity in this matter should be secured. We do not ask for any favours of any sort. We simply say that, where the goods are interchanged freely from place to place, we should be on equal footing as regards the conditions of labour. Otherwise employers who have invested large sums of money in mills, clothing-factories, warehouses, and other businesses are threatened by competition which will seriously depreciate those interests. Of course, were we at liberty throughout this colony to do as we liked as regards wages and conditions of labour, then we would meet this competition in our own way. As it is, however, we are faced with this competition, and, as I said, an endeavour is being made to tie us up in an