

687. That is to say, that they would have to adhere to our Act as a whole to effectually protect the workers here?—Certainly.

688. With respect to what you have designated as progressive legislation, do you consider that in Australia they are at least ten years behind us?—Yes.

689. As to the Factories Act, do you think it is not operative, or, in other words, like a man-of-war without guns?—I expect it is, for they cannot enforce it.

690. With inter-free-trade, with no barriers in the shape of tariffs, is it not likely that the Australian manufacturers could successfully compete against our manufacturers?—Yes, I dare say they could, on account of their larger output.

691. Even with the handicap of freight?—I have not considered it from that standpoint, but merely from the labour standpoint.

692. *Mr. Luke.*] Do you think there are any advantages to be gained by federation?—I have not seen any.

693. Do you think it would be possible to develop our public conveniences under federation, such as railways and posts and telegraphs, as well as we can under the State now?—I do not think they would receive as much attention.

694. You think generally that federation would prove detrimental to the interests of trade?—Yes, especially to the manufacturing classes.

695. *Mr. Lays.*] Are not the Victorian labour laws pretty efficient?—No, they are very cumbersome.

696. Is not our factory law framed on the basis of the Victorian statute?—No; quite different. Under the Victorian Factory Act they have a Wages Board which can be set up, with so many men from each side.

697. Is not there a classification of the hours of labour under the Factory Act?—I have not read the Victorian Act, but I have looked at the New South Wales Act, which, I understand, is something similar to the Victorian one; and certainly the New South Wales law is very inferior to ours.

698. I understand that the Wages Board in Victoria fixes a minimum wage: is that so?—Yes, sometimes.

699. It has that power?—Yes; and I think they got exceptional powers during the last session of Parliament.

700. Is not the Act working pretty well?—It did not work very well before—that is, taking the experience of the workers. I went to the Trades Hall, and inquired from the officials there as to the working of the Act.

701. Assuming the Commonwealth Parliament passes a Conciliation and Industrial Act on exactly the same lines as ours, do you think the decisions under that Act will bring the wages up to as high a level as they are now in New Zealand?—No, I do not think so.

702. You think they would take a lower level?—Yes.

703. And that that lower level would affect us here?—Yes.

704. *Hon. Major Steward.*] I understand you to say that the conditions of labour are more satisfactory in New Zealand than in Australia, and that our legislation in that respect is ahead of Victoria and New South Wales?—Yes.

705. If that is so, and New Zealand became a part of the Commonwealth, and the Commonwealth Legislature passed an Arbitration Act such as we have here, is it your opinion that the Courts set up under that Act would bring about an equality of wages by bringing down the New Zealand rate, or would it fix a rate which would be lower than that of the New Zealand rate?—I do not think they would care to start by lowering our rate to that of the other side; it is more likely that New Zealand would have to stand still until the others climbed up to her.

706. Do you think it would be a levelling-up or a levelling-down?—I should be afraid that it would be a levelling-down.

707. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Is there anything you wish to add?—Simply that in New South Wales there are only 431 Europeans—men, women, and boys—engaged in the furniture trade, as against 457 Chinese.

TUESDAY, 12TH FEBRUARY, 1901.

ALEXANDER BURT examined. (No. 22.)

708. *Hon. the Chairman.*] What is your position, Mr. Burt?—I am managing director of Messrs. A. and T. Burt (Limited), merchants and manufacturers, of Dunedin.

709. How long have you been resident in Dunedin?—Since 1861, continuously.

710. Have you resided in Australia at all?—I was for two years in Australia previous to that.

711. What is the line of manufactures in which your company are engaged?—Metals and machinery.

712. What number of hands do you employ?—Somewhere about five hundred in the different departments—all in Dunedin.

713. Have you considered the question of New Zealand federating with the Commonwealth of Australia?—Just so far as our manufactures are concerned.

713A. How do you view the matter so far as it affects the manufactures and industries of New Zealand?—In the metal industry it would affect us greatly. I do not think we could compete in any sense with an equal tariff.

714. If the terms were equal you could not compete—you could not come into competition with them at all?—Not as New Zealand stands at the present time.

715. If the terms were equal it would make a difference?—Yes. I mean that we could not compete with them equally. There would need to be a slight tariff on some things—more on some things than on others.