

other—the work has to be done at the time it is required. If you have got to arrange in that way we cannot see how it would be possible to carry on our business in any of these industries. Speaking on the question of holidays, it has never been the custom in the North—in Auckland—to pay for holidays. The Act says Christmas Day, New Year's Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, King's Birthday, and now there is a desire to include Labour Day. With regard to these holidays, too, it is a loss to the business, without having to pay for it. We estimate when we close down—supposing an order is given by the Mayor for a holiday—that a public holiday means a loss to us of from £20 to £25, and not because the hands are doing nothing, which is wilfully wrong. The next day after a holiday the men and boys never feel equal to the same work; and we therefore cannot see why these holidays should be included in this Bill. Then, there is another clause which affects us, and that is, of course, the penalty clause for compensation for accidents. We think the workman is fully protected by the Employers' Liability Act. We do not see that there is any necessity for any legislation further than that. In this boot industry, and also in the saddlery industry, it is a very serious matter. To show you the difficulty we are suffering under at the present time—and I am sorry to see intelligent workmen in New Zealand will not take the trouble to look up these matters before me; if you speak to the ordinary tradesman he will tell you manufacturers are enlarging their establishments and that trade is increasing and not diminishing. But we must take the facts and the figures. The imports of boots into New Zealand are increasing very rapidly. In 1898 the value of the boots—758,688 pairs which came into New Zealand—was £122,371; and in 1899 they increased to 874,596 pairs, of the value of £144,717. Now, gentlemen, that has been going on for some years; yet, in the face of it, I say I regret it, because, speaking of our men, we have no fault to find with them at all. I should be very sorry to have any feeling that the men should think otherwise. I should like them to pay more attention to this increased importation. The increase of these imports in 1899 over 1898 (£22,346) simply means that it would employ a factory of 150 hands and keep that factory running the whole of the year at forty-eight hours a week. This number of imports means, also, more than a pair of boots for every man, woman, and child in New Zealand—those that have been imported last year into this colony. Now, gentlemen, the men come along and they tell you, "Well, the best thing you can do is to increase the duty." I might tell you that we have only to go to our sister colony, Victoria, in that respect. Victoria has been the greatest protectionist colony of any in the Australasian group. I visited that colony some three years ago this month, and I found a prohibitive duty on boots in Victoria. Many of those boots were being manufactured in Victoria at less money than the actual duty paid on the imported article, and the state of the workers was such that I felt that I was in the Old Country and seeing men working under worse conditions than I had seen there. I do not think we want to have that state of things in this colony. Just to show you what we have to compete with—one would almost imagine that we were living in America and getting the lead from a little country like New Zealand, but it is the opposite. The American is the man to-day in manufactures. A few days ago I had a letter from America which came from my own son working in one of the large factories there. I wrote to him asking for the price of labour on a certain article in competition with ours. The price for that operation in America was 9½d. In my own factory in Auckland for the same operation it costs us 3s. 1d., a difference of 2s. 3½d. in that operation alone. You will quite see what we have to contend with, and that it is impossible for us to compete with that state of things if our hours are reduced.

99. *Captain Russell.*] What wage is the American operative earning?—He is working sixty hours a week; our men are working forty-eight hours. A man at £3 a week is as well off here as a man in America at £5. The difference in hours makes that difference.

100. *The Chairman.*] What are the earnings?—The earnings vary very much. They are all on piecework. My son is now an operator on one of the machines there. We pay a man £3 10s. a week for working the machine here; my son is getting £5 a week for the same operation there. The difference is this: my man is doing just one-fourth of the work that my son is doing in America.

101. *Captain Russell.*] What is the American earning at 9½d. per pair?—A man working at 9½d. per pair earns from £3 to £4 a week, and if he can get a constant supply of this work he can earn good wages. We, as a body of manufacturers, have come to the conclusion that it is wise to send a body of our men to America to let them see the men at work there, and they can come back and report to the men here what is being done there; we cannot convince them otherwise. We are going to subscribe for these men to go. In conclusion, I might say that the tanners and curriers, the saddlers, and the boot-manufacturers of New Zealand all think that this Bill should be withdrawn entirely. For this reason: the Factories Act as it stands has given general satisfaction. The provisions in the Factories Act which we are working under now provide for all of the contingencies of the trade. It protects the women and children and every one; and we think the men are quite protected under our Arbitration and Conciliation Courts, and the colony now requires a rest from its labour legislation. This year I have spent three weeks in Christchurch and one week here—that is four weeks I am away from my business—and I have given an immense amount of time in Auckland to my association. It is harassing our business to pieces. I will take a report from two of our companies in the boot trade to show that this legislation on the businesses must come to an end. It is reported that one of our companies is not able to pay a dividend this year. One, which has only been able to pay a dividend eight years out of twenty, has come out with about 5 per cent. This industry, which is employing some thousands of hands, and the other allied industries dependent upon it, is a large one. We are quite willing and quite satisfied with the late decision of the Court, and we feel sure that if our men will only qualify themselves that they will be able to earn good wages, and that we shall be able to keep out the imported article.

102. *Mr Tanner.*] What are the average earnings of them, taking the whole body of them, in your factory?—We have no men under the minimum wage. I should think that the average earnings are from £2 5s. to £2 10s. for forty-eight hours.

103. Are there any at £2?—There are none under £2 2s. You know as well as I do that if these men like to qualify themselves they might earn far more. The great difficulty with the young colonial workman is that he has no ambition to excel beyond a certain point in his business, because