

THOMAS E. TAYLOR, M.H.R., examined. (No. 10.)

159. *The Chairman.*] You wish to make a statement?—Yes. I am informed by a number of workers in Christchurch, upon whose statements I place almost complete reliance, that there are a number of instances there of women who have earned up to 17s. a week under the present Factories Act, and have been employed after the age of twenty-one at less than 17s. a week. I cannot just now give names, but I am quite satisfied that there have been such cases in Christchurch, and there are girls now over twenty-one years of age who have been employed previously in what was alleged to be learning a trade, receiving less than 17s. a week. I have a list here of cases of girls over twenty years of age who are being underpaid. There is one girl 19½ years of age getting 8s. a week; she has been in the employ of a particular firm for four years. Another one of twenty years is earning less than 15s. in the same employ. There is another girl of twenty-two years whose wages are 12s. 6d. a week; one of twenty-one years, 15s.; one of seventeen years, 8s.; one of twenty-one years, 15s.; one between eighteen and nineteen years, 10s.; one of eighteen years, 10s. 6d.; one of eighteen years, 11s. Then I have a letter here which I propose to read. It says, "I must thank you very much for again trying to bring in an amendment to the Factories Act. I notice the Bill has passed its second reading, and I sincerely trust you will get it right through this session as quickly as possible. Another urgent need of the 17s. per week being made a compulsory wage was brought under my notice last week—namely, a shirtmaking factory in the city, where the employer pays women at the rate of 2½d. per shirt. To earn 17s. per week at this rate a girl must make eighty-two shirts—an utter impossibility. The most a girl earns at this place is 15s. . . . You will easily see how these women are 'sweated.' A girl who worked there told me that the highest amount earned was 15s., and this by a woman of thirty. If they complain they are dismissed, and dozens of others try the work. Girls are far too plentiful, hence the poor wages paid. Please do your utmost to get the Bill through early. Seventeen shillings is only sufficient for food if a girl has no home, and can we wonder so many lose their sense of honour in the struggle. Employers of women are all unprincipled in the matter of paying a living-wage. Thanking you for your kindness, I am," &c. The evidence to-day has gone to show that the employers pay what they can, but without considering the living-wage. These are some of the reasons which have induced me to bring the Bill in, and I submit that the whole of the evidence this morning shows that the Bill is a perfectly safe thing, because it only proposes to fix the minimum wage for people over twenty years of age, exactly the same as it is under the Factories Act for persons under twenty years of age. I leave the Bill to the Committee to deal with.

160. *Mr. Alison.*] Are the communications you have received from some of the persons affected, or from persons who are representing their interests?—The memos I have been reading from are from an educated workwoman in Christchurch, who is very keenly interested in the condition of her sister-workers, but she is in very good employment herself and getting perhaps £2 per week. She is a very skilled worker.

161. You gave us a list of persons receiving wages less than 17s. per week?—Yes, that comes from the woman I have referred to.

162. Have they been in employment for any length of time?—One has completed her four years.

163. Is not that a breach of the Factories Act?—Yes, and I proposed to the writer that she should take steps to bring the matter before the Labour Bureau, but she pointed out that it would lead to dismissal of the girl, and she did not want to be responsible for depriving the girl of her scanty earnings.

164. Do you consider that the non-enforcement of that law because it would be detrimental to the interests of that individual should be a reason for your urging that a further law should be made?—Yes, I still think so, because in all laws affecting wages there are isolated cases where you must allow the individual to be victimised rather than throw the person out of employment.

165. After hearing the evidence this morning, do you still consider 17s. should be the minimum?—Yes, I consider it enough for the scantiest living; in fact, I do not know how people can live on it.

166. *Mr. Aitken.*] In the list you gave us I suppose you do not know whether all the instances happen in one firm, or whether they are scattered?—There are four firms affected.

167. They are all in Christchurch?—Yes.

168. *Mr. Barber.*] You say that what you ask for is that the law which applies to an employee up to twenty years of age shall apply to employees of twenty-one years and upwards?—Yes. My contention is that there should be a minimum living-wage for every adult person in this colony. The existing law grades the wage up to the adult age, and it has just fixed a bare living-wage up to that stage.

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