

Australia I found that the people some years ago were in the position we were in, and they were in that position until the Labour Government introduced a protective tariff—not a revenue tariff. Our tariff is largely a revenue tariff as far as hats are concerned. In Australia, as a result of the protective tariff, the turnover of one Melbourne company is £180,000 per annum, or more than the value of the whole of the hats required for New Zealand in a year. Our importations in 1916 were valued at £139,000, and probably not more than half of that would be for felt hats. I am prepared to give to the Committee in confidence the name of the firm in Melbourne. There is another point: The manufacturers here are responsible for only about 20 per cent. of the hats used in New Zealand not because they cannot make them, but because they cannot make them to pay. They cannot do the first processes to pay. While in Australia I noticed that the manufacturers, although they have a much higher tariff than we have, were selling their hats for less than half of what they can be imported for here from any other part of the world. One manufacturer told me that he was satisfied with his profits, and he had no intention of raising the price. The point is that if a tariff is raised it does not follow that the public have to pay the difference. In Australia the locally made hats are being supplied at less than half the cost of the imported hat, and our position would be similar, except that the landed cost would be slightly less. When we come back to normal, the three factories in New Zealand will be starving for business. We think that the tariff in Australia is something like the one we ought to have in New Zealand. In New Zealand the tariff is: "Hats of all kinds, including straw hats, also caps, 25 per cent. *ad valorem*." There is no preferential tax in New Zealand on hats. Hats from England, where they pay higher wages than in Europe, have to pay the same tariff as hats from Europe. Before the war the Italian and Austrian hats, for which the manufacturers had to pay wages of from 3d. to 5d. per hour, with a week of sixty or eighty hours, could come into New Zealand with the same percentage tariff as the English hats. The Australian tariff is: "On goods the produce or manufacture of the United Kingdom—wool-felt hats, in any stage of manufacture, 15s. per dozen, 35 per cent. *ad val.*, whichever rate returns the higher duty; fur-felt hats, in any stage of manufacture, 24s. per dozen, 35 per cent. *ad val.*, whichever rate returns the higher duty." We would suggest, then—(1) That the Australian duty on felt hats and hoods from the United Kingdom be adopted for New Zealand, and an addition of 50 per cent. on the above be charged on them from all other countries; and (2) that hatmakers' machinery, tools, and raw materials should be placed on the free list.

1. *To Mr. Hornsby.*] If the Government do as I suggest it would be possible to build up an industry in New Zealand. I will guarantee to do it, and utilize the rabbit-fur, which would not then be exported.

2. *To Dr. A. K. Newman.*] In the second year of the war we employed in Wellington about forty hands, and at present we employ about ten. I think the other firms in New Zealand are in the same position. If the tariff I suggest were placed on hats it would encourage the firms and engage probably six hundred or seven hundred hands. Several of the processes require skilled labour, but a large proportion of the labour is unskilled.

3. *To Mr. Craigie.*] A large proportion of the hats we get in comes from Australia. If New Zealand adopted the Australian tariff hats would be cheaper than they are at present. We cannot make the hood for the hat and sell it at its cost before the war. I am not aware that some of the hats that were imported from England before the war were made in Austria, where labour is cheap. There might have been a few, but the bulk of the hats from England comes from reputable firms in that country. The Japanese have got into the market in New Zealand in straw hats. There is a big profit on hats. If the price to the manufacturer is 8s., the price to the public would be 20s. If the tariff is put on it would be dearer to the manufacturer, but not necessarily to the public.

4. *To Mr. Sidey.*] Hats are not made right through in New Zealand to-day. They were in the past, but the factories had to close down. If the Committee recommends the tariff I suggest, and the Government adopts it, it would not be necessary for the Government to regulate the price of hats, because the competition would regulate the price.

5. *To the Chairman.*] The high duty in Australia has tended to keep the prices to the public low.

ROBERT W. DE MONTALK, Architect, examined. (No. 5.)

I wish to speak about the use of concrete blocks for building and other purposes. My purpose in giving evidence is principally with the hope of inducing the substitution of a better medium than timber in buildings, fences, and the like, and a better material than stone and clay-binding for roads, but particularly to deal with concrete as a substitute for timber and corrugated iron in the building of dwellings. There are three essentials in connection with the housing problem—cheapness, damp-proof, and quickness in erection—and, in addition, permanence and fireproof are desirable. By the use of concrete and reinforced concrete in certain shapes these points can be placed at the disposal of every one building a home, provided one condition is forthcoming—that is, sufficient capital to provide adequate machinery and labour, in order to enable production in quantity such as is provided in the timber industry. Houses may be built in concrete and reinforced concrete on lines identical with those of the present wooden houses. Boards, studs, rafters, &c., would all be made of reinforced concrete. The houses could be made with hollow walls, and thus would be damp-proof, which has hitherto been a difficulty in regard to concrete houses. I can state definitely that, given sufficient and efficient machinery and orders for materials in quantity, concrete houses can be built at the present price of wooden houses. Further, in designs where flat concrete roofs are a feature the cost of building will be reduced accordingly. In this climate pitched roofs are unnecessary, and the flat roof would be a desirable feature. Concrete houses would cost the same as wooden houses, but there would not be the necessity of