

CHARLES A. MYHRE, President, Christchurch Wholesale Clothing Manufacturers' Association, examined. (No. 32.)

Leaving out the war period, during which time conditions were abnormal, following is the number of hands employed at the end of each census period in the clothing-manufacturing industry: 1896, 2,151; 1901, 2,626; 1906, 1,914; 1911, 2,947. The clothing manufactured in 1911 was valued at £507,125. The clothing imported in 1911 was, at landed value, £1,378,855; and we wish to point out that if this amount had been manufactured in the Dominion it would have given employment to an additional number of 8,012 hands, and this number again would be equivalent to an increase in population of 30,589. During the war period the importation of clothing nearly stopped, and the demand fell upon the Dominion producers. The result was entirely satisfactory to the purchasers, and we believe the public has now become so accustomed to our goods and the better value of the same we feel sure they will prefer our clothing in times to come. It follows, however, that it will be necessary to materially increase the output to cope with the anticipated additional demand, and also in order to prevent business houses—that is, the merchant—reverting to the importing of large quantities of clothing which we are satisfied can and should be manufactured in the Dominion. Scarcity of female labour: The manufacturers during the war period were unable to promptly meet the demands, the chief drawback being the scarcity of female labour. This state of affairs was general all over the Dominion, and in considering this question we feel there is little hope of ever obtaining sufficient journeywomen in this Dominion through the usual channel. We base this assumption chiefly on the fact that very few apprentices are available, and it looks as if there were more attractive avenues opening up for young girls. *Re immigration*: Having come to the above conclusions, we venture to suggest that the Government should seriously consider immigration, not necessarily of single girls, but of families; and if this course was adopted we feel sure that a considerable improvement would be manifested in a comparatively short period. *Re tariff*: To prevent the industry falling back to pre-war conditions, and in order to maintain the comparatively high standard of living here, protection is, of course, necessary, especially as it can only be looked for that outside competition will become more and more aggressive, due to every country having to do its best to meet extraordinary taxation; and we think the amount of protection should be revised from time to time so that it should be at least quite equal to the difference between wages in other countries and our own. Cheap shoddy clothing: In order to prevent the importation of large quantities of inferior and shoddy clothing we would suggest that in addition to the present *ad valorem* duty the impost of a fixed sum per garment would not only be beneficial to the industry, but would also be in the interests of the Dominion.

1. *To Mr. Forbes.*] The price of the Dominion clothing has not advanced to a very great degree. An ordinary ready-made suit of clothes has advanced about 20 per cent. or 25 per cent., but English clothing has advanced possibly two or three times the previous cost. A suit costing £9 would not be a New Zealand tweed, but would probably be an English tweed. That is a point to find out. You can at the present time obtain a suit of colonial tweed at quite a reasonable price. I refer to a suit made by a tailor. You could obtain a suit of wearable material at from £4 to £6. Under the heading of clothing-manufacture I include suits—coats, vests, and trousers—and overcoats. What the manufacturer wants now is more hands. I should say that the average wage of a journeywoman would be £1 15s. a week, and hundreds, I think, are getting more like £2 a week. The minimum wage is £1 7s. 6d., plus 10 per cent. war bonus; the working-hours are forty-five a week.

2. *To Mr. Veitch.*] Of the hands employed in the factory I think there would be 25 per cent. males and 75 per cent. females.

3. *To Mr. Poland.*] Since the war we have been able to manufacture all the clothing required in New Zealand, but inadequately. We have orders untouched at the present time that have been in hand for eight months. A good deal of work was done, and a good deal more would have been done if the labour had been available. The stocks held by retailers have been at the lowest margin. The wages paid here are high compared with what they were before the war. The wholesale and the retail man between them would make 40 per cent., and it might go up to 50 per cent. In the majority of cases the article goes direct from the manufacturer to the retail house. If it goes direct from the manufacturer to the retailer there is still one profit, and that would vary from 20 per cent. to 50 per cent. As to the necessity for a warehouse, if you did not call it a warehouse there would have to be a distributing business.

4. *To Mr. Hudson.*] I want to keep out the lower class of goods. A shoddy tweed could be made up here. If shoddy is going to come in in garments it may as well be made up here. The impost duty might not keep out the garments altogether. If the garments can be kept out, keep out the tweed also. The tweeds manufactured in New Zealand only start at a certain price, which is considerably above the shoddy tweed.

5. *To the Chairman.*] A man can buy a suit of New Zealand clothes for £3 10s. or £4 out of a shop. The shoddy suit would cost from £1 5s. to £1 10s. It would be no hardship to make him do without the shoddy.

6. *To Mr. Hornsby.*] A prohibitive duty ought to be put on all shoddy goods. It would be a protection to the wearer as well as to the industry. It is the cheap goods we declaim against, which claim to be woollen and are not woollen.

7. *To Mr. Luke.*] The word "shoddy" should never be applied to a bad article. It was really yarn which was manufactured from cuttings, and not from wool straight off the sheep's back. Shearers, for instance, required something that would do for three or four weeks, and was then thrown away. There is nothing to prevent a fairly good trade being done in that line by still importing cheap English tweeds and manufacturing them here.