

on the Charitable Aid Board, as after the Austrians have done with the field old men and children cannot get any gum, as they take all the surface gum. When Mr. Ballance was in office he told Mr. Collins (present) that if he could get forty men to settle they could have any block they pleased. They chose the Ramarama Block. Mr. Newmann was told to survey it. I got the forty signatures, but the survey was so long delayed that the Ministry went out of office, and the succeeding Ministry failed to carry out Mr. Ballance's proposal, and half the block was disposed of under perpetual lease. Mr. Ballance said he would see about conserving the gum-land near Ramarama. This is a good field, and diggers can still make a living, and could do so for several years to come; but if two hundred Austrians come here next winter I shall not be able to get any. I hear three hundred are coming here next winter. They took an immense quantity of gum last time. The books of the storekeepers would show how much the Austrians get out of the ground. There are not many gum-diggers proper now; the settlers and their sons have taken the place of them. There are only about fifty *bona fide* British gum-diggers on this field apart from settlers. I think they are not making much over tucker now that the ground is hard; the general run are just making tucker. When I came on this field first I cleared £2 and £3 a week. I believe I could hardly clear tucker now. The Austrians work very long hours—from sunrise to sunset. Some of them told me they were making from £1 to £1 10s. clear. In travelling backwards and forwards at all hours of the night I have seen the Austrians with their children travelling with loads at night and returning after dark, carrying gum gathered since daybreak. They are very hardworking, and the storekeepers have nothing to say against them, but they ruin the settlers. Settlers have no objection to the Austrians as neighbours, but they work from daylight to dark. The settlers hold that these men, if they take up land and settle, would be on the same footing as themselves. They would have to stop in the district and take their share with the others. The land will not keep us, and we are dependent on the gum. When the settlers want to send their rent to Auckland they have to go on the field and get gum. These Austrians come in the meantime and take the gum from the fields, and so we cannot pay our rent, or live. These Austrians do not compete with us on the same footing. I came here to settle in the district, without any intention of digging gum. My children had to dig gum sometimes. My money has been getting less, and it is a difficult matter for me to pay my rent now. My land was to be forfeited, but I got it renewed. If these Austrians came here to take away other national wealth, such as totara- or kauri-trees, they could not do so without expenditure of capital; but they have merely to buy a spade and a spear, and they proceed to take the capital out of the colony. I would propose, if a gumfield reserve was made for settlers, that the way to work it would be as follows: Appoint five or seven trustees to control the field for the use of the settlers only. I object to an export duty. If the export duty was £3 per ton I should have 3s. per hundredweight to pay in addition to the royalty to dig on leased land; consequently, I should be paying an utterly unfair proportion of the price of the road-maintenance, even if the money obtained by the export duty was ear-marked, and so set aside for works in the North. We, as settlers, already pay our road-rates; and thus we should be paying with both hands— $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in the pound general rate, and $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in the pound special rate. Storekeepers would be exempt from any share in the export duty. The gum merchants in Auckland form themselves into a "ring," and determine what price shall be paid in the ensuing month or two, and on some occasions there have been very heavy drops, even to 10s. per hundredweight, when the Home market was not fluctuating at all. This is a peculiar district, which has been entirely dependent upon the gumfields, and without them could not have been settled. I do not object to an export duty if it could be arranged that the weight of paying it should not fall on ourselves.

[The following gentlemen were sworn, and agreed with the evidence given by Mr. John Gray: Henry Bartlett, Henry Collins, R. W. Brown, and Francis Thomas Cowan.]

TOWAI.

Robert Marshall: I am a settler, a storekeeper, and the largest buyer of gum in this district for the last nine years, and am well acquainted with the gum industry in these parts. This is a winter field. There are only eight men here now; they are all British, and are just earning tucker. In the winter time they can do better—some 10s., £1, and £1 10s. clear of tucker. There were fifty here last winter. Of these, five were Austrians. The British, on the average, will pay 10s. a week for tucker, and the Austrians about 5s. and 6s. a week. Austrians live principally on rice, potatoes, and lard. The Austrians get more gum than the British, as they work from daylight to dark. I never saw the Austrians at work, but I believe they take it on the face, taking all the gum. I have a leased field, and formerly I would not allow any Austrians to work on it; the reason was that the Britishers were annoyed at the Austrians coming. My lease is about six miles long and in places two miles wide—the Maramaka and other blocks. It is pretty well done now. The gum obtained is very good. For re-scraped £5 per hundredweight is got from the merchants in Auckland; half-scraped, £3 16s. It runs from £2 to £5. The carting of the gum knocks the roads about, and if the roads were made properly the digger could get at least 1s. a hundredweight more for his gum, and get his provisions proportionately cheaper. If the roads are bad it takes five horses to do the work of three. It would make a difference of 2s. if the roads were good—1s. on his gum and 1s. on his provisions. No gum-licenses were ever taken out except in the Puhipuhi. They would cost more to collect than they are worth. I have an old man on my place who would not be able to pay a license; he only earns about 3s. 6d. a week. I give him his milk, and he is just able to live. I charge Britishers nothing to work on my lease, and Austrians £1. I give a written agreement to the effect that the diggers must sell gum to me and buy my stores; for this they have the right to dig gum. Some Austrians have paid their £1 in order to make sure of coming back to me next winter. There have never been more than thirty-five Austrians at work on the adjacent Crown lands. I am