

a few years the gum industry in the North will be destroyed by the Austrians. I have felt it so much that I have refused on all occasions to give an Austrian a start. I have never refused a Britisher. The Austrians are still increasing; every steamer brings more. They are simply taking away what can never be returned, and they are not spending the money in the country. I am quite satisfied that the Government could grant the Commissioners information as to how much money has been sent out of this district in the last nine months. I am sure it will amount to several thousand pounds. From here north we are those thousands poorer. The greatest evil is in so far as it affects the small settlers. A large majority of those engaged in the gumfields at the present time are settlers who have taken up small portions of land, 50 to 100 acres in extent. After felling a piece of bush, they can do nothing until the burning-time comes, and they go on the fields and earn a few pounds. They have their burn, and with the money earned by the gum they put in grass-seed, or do some fencing. If the Austrians glean all the gum the settlers are unable to effect their improvements. There is a great absence of public money spent here on public works, and the settlers have only the gum to depend on. From hearsay, most of the storekeepers give the Austrians a good character. I have no dealings with them, except a few casual sales. I would suggest that in the vicinity of gumfields small sections of land be set apart for gum-diggers, including Austrians, and that they be compelled to settle on these sections, and improve them, and erect a dwelling-place, and spend a certain sum on improvements. That is one suggestion. It may not be practical, but nearly always in the vicinity of gumfields there are small patches which would be good for small gardens. Another suggestion is that gumfields (Crown lands) should be handed over to the management of the local bodies, and that they should, as a body, have the power of issuing gum-licenses, and power of refusal to any one. I believe if the local body acted wisely on behalf of their district they would settle the difficulty, and relieve the Government from dealing with the international question. It would be very different if the great majority of diggers saw that the local body was trying to conserve their interests, and they would assist the local body in carrying out the measure. The old-men diggers will soon be a thing of the past, the Austrians leaving them nothing to dig. These men, in the option of the local body, may be exempt, they having a personal knowledge of the men who should be exempt. I have known diggers here make easily £4 to £5 a week, but very few of them can do that now; that is, with the superior kind of gum. I have never dealt with this inferior gum myself. It rises and falls very rapidly sometimes. A man will have to work hard eight hours on the field, and scrape at night, to earn £1 5s. to £1 10s. a week round here now. There is a spurt now with inferior gum, and most of the diggers have gone where they can get it. It is dug in large quantities, and the diggers can make better wages than on the good fields. With reference to the issuing of licenses, each county should issue its own, and a man going to another county would have to get a license from that county. There are two objects in view: first, removal of the Austrians from the field; second, the local body should get some revenue from the gumfields. The gumfields of the colony contribute as much to the general revenue, and probably more than, as any other industry in the colony in the consumption of dutiable goods, but the local body gets no benefit from it, and the roads are destroyed. The two trades that have made Auckland—the gum and the timber—pay no duty whatever, and the local bodies get no benefit from it. My suggestions are: Diggers, both Britishers and Austrians, to be compelled to take up small sections of land in the vicinity of gumfields, and the Government to hand over gum-bearing Crown lands to the local bodies to collect licenses. We have never collected a license-fee. It is 5s. now, but we want a free hand. We would make the license-fee with exceptions for old men; I would have a scale ranging from 2s. 6d. up to £20. When the Wages Protection Bill was before the House I objected to the clauses relating to the truck system, and they were thrown out. A man comes to me without a rag to his back. I give him a start, costing from £1 to £1 10s. He brings his gum to me, and gets the highest price, without any conditions whatever. If that was held to be truck, what position should I be in? If it was illegal I should not be able to start him. What would the digger's position be? If that section had been passed it would apply to storekeepers on Crown lands as well as those on private lands. I considered that there was no occasion for making the truck clause in the Wages Protection Bill applicable to storekeepers on Crown lands. Seventy-five per cent. of the diggers who get a start now would be refused on the open fields if that Bill had passed. Why should a storekeeper lay himself open to a breach of the Act for giving a digger a start? I used to work a bush here, and advance a certain contractor over £100 in goods and tools, and have paid his men the first three months, when he had not earned a shilling for himself. What should I have done if an Act had prevented me recovering my money. My greatest objection to the Austrians is the injury they inflict upon the small settlers; and the question is whether as a nation we should destroy our own people by encouraging the Austrians, or, by removing the Austrians from the fields, promote the interests of the small settlers.

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*Frederick William Sanderson:* I am accountant to Molesworth and Saies, and agent for the Northern Steamship Company. I have been resident in this district thirteen years, and am well acquainted with the gum industry. The gum trade is less now than it was six years ago. Formerly it ran to 300 tons per annum; now it is about 200 tons. There is no great difference in the grades now as compared with former years. We get a little of the low grade, but it is chiefly white gum. We are getting better prices now. I have noticed that although there are rises and falls in the market, each succeeding fall is above that of the preceding one. The Britishers do complain about the Austrians. It is more so at first, before they know the men, than afterwards, the reason being that they are exceedingly upright honest men. Austrians never quarrel with