

a most extraordinary experience in the matter of ladies' jackets. There has been a very great slump in the market, and the country has been inundated with importations of low-class goods and cheaply made ladies' jackets, which have been sold at very low prices all through the colony. The result has had a most depressing effect upon that department of our industry, so much so that we have suffered heavily on that account. I do not know that I wish to suggest a cure. In attending this deputation I may explain that I was taken rather unawares. I have only just arrived from the North, and did not know that this deputation was arranged until after I had arrived here. We have certainly suffered severely by the tremendous over-importation of ladies' jackets, which are being sold at prices that we cannot compete with at all. Another point with regard to the importation of shoddy clothing is this: that while in the matter of ready-made clothing of the better class I cannot say we have suffered, we have been very seriously injured in the matter of juvenile clothing. Little boys' suits of clothes are landed here at a total price which is considerably less than what we have to pay for the actual making and trimming.

149. *Hon. Sir J. G. Ward.*] Is that duty paid?—Yes. I refer particularly here to boys' serge sailor suits, which are landed at remarkably low prices. I cannot tell you what nature of cloth they are made of, but the fact is that large quantities of juvenile clothing are landed here at a price we absolutely cannot compete with. There is also a considerable quantity of men's tweed trousers of a low class imported at very low prices, and a certain number of these go into consumption. With regard to the better class of men's suits, ranging from £1 10s. upwards, I think we can hold our own, and I do not know that I have anything to suggest about them. I have, however, in my pocket a sample of tweed [Produced]. This is a 56 in. tweed, which was invoiced at 1s. 6d. per yard and lands here at 2s. 1½d. That class of material is landed, and a considerable amount is being manufactured into clothing here. Of course, it will have to be made up under colonial conditions of making up, but when that cloth is made up at Home under the conditions prevailing there we certainly cannot compete with it. For tweed that lands here at 2s. 1½d. a yard we should want 5s. a yard; that is the price of double width. Here is another sample of low-grade vicuna cloth which is imported into the colony at the present time [Produced]. The width is 56 in., and the price at Home is 1s. 8d. per yard, and it lands here at 2s. 5d. It is a class of cloth we find it impossible to compete with. A vicuna cloth of this weight made here of good wool would be at the very least 7s. 6d.

150. *Mr. Laurensen.*] What is this made up with, then?—That is a conundrum I am not prepared to answer. A good quantity of it is being sold in the colony, even in short lengths, as being a good cloth, and people are very often victimised by it.

151. *Hon. Sir J. G. Ward.*] It is what you call a mixture?—It is absolute shoddy, I should say. On good woollen cloths we do not want any protection. I am only speaking for my own company, of course, but we are perfectly satisfied with the present duty. Before the last Tariff Commission we recommended that if there should be any change contemplated in the tariff it should be in the direction of lowering the duty rather than raising it. But I think, Mr. Chairman, in the interests of the public, something should be done to brand that kind of stuff. I am not a partisan in the matter of high duties at all, however, because I think if any industry cannot stand on its own merits it is better not to have it. I mentioned before the low class of sailor suits that are imported. There is one class of suit which comes in at 2s. 6½d.

152. Is that for the whole suit?—Yes, including blouse and knickers. This low class of juvenile sailor suit, of which an enormous quantity is used in the colony, is sold at from 2s. 6½d. up to 3s. 6d. Now, supposing the retailer takes a profit of one-third—which I suppose would be a reasonable thing—he can sell that suit in grading up the sizes at from 3s. 6d. to 6s. 6d., whilst the lowest line of sailor suit that we can produce here to compete with that would cost the retailer from 7s. 6d. to 8s. 6d. Of course, this Committee is well aware that in the clothing-manufacturing trade we are working under an award of the Arbitration Court, which compels us to pay certain prices; and in the matter of the manufacture of woollens, our mill and the other Canterbury mills are in this unique position: that we are the only mills in the colony that are working under awards of the Arbitration Court. All the other mills in the colony are not working under the same conditions.

153. Are they working under the same scale as you are?—In some instances I do not think they are. That is my own opinion. Of course, in talking of the great competition in the low-class garments—which are only a portion of the trade—I wish the Committee to understand that in regard to the better class goods I do not suggest any alteration. In shoddy goods, however, in the interests of the public—and also in the interests of the trade, although I do not come here crying out for anything—I think the consumer should be protected, and to a reasonable extent the manufacturer should be considered also. There is another matter I should like to refer to—that is, in regard to ladies' dress tweeds. There was a time when we did a large trade in such goods, but it has to a very great extent almost disappeared, owing to the importation of imitation woollen goods, which to all appearances, as regards patterns and cloth looking fairly heavy, are the same; but they are not all wool, and the consequence is that, speaking for ourselves, while allowing for variation of fashion, that trade has almost disappeared. In the matter of woollen shirtings, we find that we are competed very strongly against by imported shirtings, which are not all wool, but which have the appearance and weight of our own. Of course, one item which must be considered when comparing imported clothing with New Zealand clothing is the cost of making and trimming, which is very much larger here, and in many cases is as much as, if not more than, the cost of the material which is used. I think the only suggestion I can make to the Committee is that it should entertain the question whether shoddy goods should not be branded in some way. Fox's serge, for instance, which is a very good make of serge, is marked on every yard of the selvage. Some other mills have adopted the same practice with regard to their piece-goods, and I think if shoddy piece-goods were marked in some shape or form the difficulty which we point out would in a measure be met.