

you put an increased duty on these goods you would make a man pay two or three shillings more for the suit than he pays at the present time. Therefore I say that by putting a duty on an article which cannot be produced in the colony and which the people require you are doing those people an injustice. There are lots of poor people in Auckland who have to dress their children in that cheap class of blue serge [Sample produced]. Now we come to the dress-stuffs, which range up in landed cost from 1s. 5d. a yard. The lowest colonial dress tweed, which would be a very raw-looking article at the price, would be about 2s. a yard, as against this 1s. 5d., and it would not look anything like the imported article. The lowest colonial dress tweed of from 45 in. to 50 in. wide would be about 2s. a yard; and, besides, the mills could only produce one certain class of dress tweed, whereas when new tweeds are opened up fashionable people want a variety of kinds, and that variety they could not get from the mills in the colony, because we have not got the machinery here, nor the designers necessary to produce them. Consequently you would only be imposing on these people extra burdens by raising the duty for no purpose at all. It would also be very hard upon a woman if she wanted a low-priced dress-piece and could not get it. Coming to blankets and rugs, we find that the mills manufacture a very large quantity of blankets. We buy a very large quantity ourselves, and they are produced to advantage; but when you come down to the gum-digger and the poor people with large families they want something cheaper than the colonial mills can supply, and we have to supply that demand. We get cheap blankets and rugs, but you can get an imported rug that costs about half the price of the colonial one. I refer, of course, to the very cheap articles. Then we come to mantle-cloths used in making up jackets. People will have jackets when they are fashionable, and we have to keep an immense variety of stuff. You could not get that variety here even if the mills could make the stuff at all. I have samples of a large number of kinds here, and the amount required in the colony of one kind would be so small that it would not pay to put it on the looms. The upshot of that would be that any woman who wanted to buy a jacket of a particular kind would have to pay a great deal more for it than she would if the stuff were imported, and I maintain that if people have not got the money with which to pay for the better article it would be very hard to make them pay more for the cheap goods. With regard to shoddy, it has already been said that most of the smooth-faced cloths have more or less shoddy in them, and if a law were once passed that goods should not be sold that had anything like shoddy in them you would not know where the matter would end or what the additional burdens on the people would amount to. There is hardly anything in these goods that would not be brought under the provision. The question is not merely confined to tweeds. It takes a very much wider range, and would affect a great many more people than any one imagines looking at it from first sight.

149. *Mr. Rutherford.*] You stated that these vicuna suits can be supplied retail at about £1 5s. ready-made?—Yes, made up in the ordinary factories.

150. I presume the cost of the raw material is very small as compared with the cost of the labour required to produce them?—It might make a difference of 2s. or 3s. If you made a difference of 2s. a suit in the initial cost, by the time it got to the consumer it would mean 3s., and perhaps more.

151. But the cost of the wool would be very small as compared with the labour in making the suit?—The people want either a vicuna or a serge. You can get an English tweed at two-thirds of the price of a colonial tweed. I do not say the colonial tweed is not relatively as good value, but it is a matter of price. If a man wants a twenty-five-shilling suit we have to get it for him.

152. But is not the price of the goods influenced more by the price of labour than by the cost of the material, and therefore the reason why goods manufactured here are much dearer, or cost an additional price, is that the labour here is dear?—There are poor people who cannot afford to pay a higher price than they pay for this low-class stuff, and if the duty were raised on that class of goods these people would be called upon to pay more.

153. Then, I understand you are not in favour of any change in the tariff?—Certainly not. The woollen-manufacturers have the benefit of 22½ per cent., which is ample protection, and the only trouble is that there are too many woollen-mills in the colony. There are ten mills, or one mill for every 90,000 people. If we had a large export trade it would be a different matter.

154. *Mr. Barber.*] With regard to ladies' dress and mantle cloths, these are practically not manufactured in the colony—the mills do not lay themselves out for it?—A great point was made by one of the representatives of the woollen-mills, that his mill could not make dress-tweeds on account of the stuff that was being imported; but the reason for that is that their class of tweeds was not in fashion, while their price was so high in comparison that only a few people could buy them. Mr. Hercus, I understand, said that they lost money over their mantles.

155. You say that the colonial manufacturers cannot produce stuff that will compete with the samples produced?—I say that the mills do not and cannot compete with them.

156. You said that the imported dress-material was 1s. 5d. a yard, and that the best thing the mills could do would be up to 2s. I want to show that the mills are not entering into that business at all?—It is not a matter of comparison at all. What I want to show is that if the matter were carried any further a lot of goods would come under the increased tariff which would be of no benefit to the woollen-mills at all. I am not arguing against the mills as far as they go and can do.

157. Do the mills make women's dress-tweeds and mantle-cloths?—They have made them, but I do not know exactly whether they are doing so at the present moment. They have attempted to make them.

158. Are they making dress-goods now?—Yes, to a very small extent.

159. Have they ever made mantle-cloths?—Not to my knowledge. I have been told that they imported the cloth. My point was this: not to say there was no comparison in the cloths at all, but to show that the mills cannot advantageously make these dress-goods, and that if this extra duty were imposed it would fall upon such articles as these with no advantage to the mills, and would increase the burdens of the people.