

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

FRIDAY, 13TH OCTOBER, 1905.

Deputation of employees in attendance.

HARRY WILLIS examined. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman*: What are you?—An ironmoulder.

2. Employed at?—Messrs. Andersons' (Limited).

3. Of Christchurch?—Yes.

4. You wish to give evidence with regard to these petitions?—I should first like to state the request of the workers, and then to make a few remarks in support of that request. Is there any particular form of procedure?

5. No. Just make your statement in your own way?—I may say briefly that the workers' request is that a duty of not less than 40 per cent. should be imposed on all imported American agricultural implements and machinery. They wish it to be clearly understood that they do not ask for any duty to be imposed on any American machines or implements if similar machines or implements are not manufactured in the colony at the present moment. In support of that request I may say that I have here a copy of a report of a joint conference held by representatives of the Trades and Labour Council and the Industrial Association, from which I propose to read extracts. This refers to the agricultural-implement industry in New Zealand, and extracts are taken from the evidence given before the Royal Commission appointed in Australia in connection with the International Harvester Trust's operations in that country.

"The industry is practically stationary" [this paragraph applies to the colonially-manufactured implements], "and is not increasing as it should do in accordance with the increase of population and wider settlements of the lands. Were it not for the heavy freight charges, &c., on drays and rollers, which prevent their importation to any large extent, the manufacturers would not be able to show even as good results as they now do. Evidence was given that manufacturers were decreasing their turn-out and increasing their importations in self-defence to enable them to compete with the American imports. There is an increased demand for agricultural machinery of all descriptions, but this is being met by increased importations and not by increased local manufactures.

"Outside competition is seriously increasing. The import values of 1900 were £72,000; 1904, £124,000; and 1905 showed every prospect of a large increase over 1904. Of the total £124,000 for 1904, the American contribution was £80,000. From Great Britain the imports were £34,000, but the class of goods received hence do not enter into competition with those from America.

"There are certain types of implements made in the colony which are much preferred by the farmer, but the American manufacturers are now copying them and putting them on the market at lower rates. The Americans are making great inroads with such machinery as drills, cultivators, ploughs, hay-rakes, harrows, and discs. . . . The Customs tariff is a serious handicap to the industry. The made-up machines come in free of duty, while the local manufacturer, who must of necessity import some of the material used in the made-up machines, such as pipes, galvanised iron, clear-pine, and hardwood timber, has to pay duty on same. The preferential tariff also affects materials such as bar iron, steel bars and angles, and various articles of hardware and raw material used by the colonial manufacturer.

"Evidence was produced that America was practically making the colonies a dumping-ground for her over-productions, and that reapers-and-binders selling in New Zealand at £45 were catalogued in America at \$250.

"One local firm had endeavoured to make a specialty of a certain machine, and just as success crowned their efforts they found that one had been sent to America, copied there, although lighter and flimsier in build, and was now being imported duty-free and sold so much cheaper that the local article was completely knocked out.

"At the joint committee meeting already referred to considerable evidence was given, and statements were made as to the working of the American International Harvester Trust, and the disastrous effects likely to ensue unless some means were taken to stop its operations, which means the closing of our factories, the throwing-out of work of the large number of hands now employed in this particular branch of our local manufactures, and, in the long-run, when all competitors are crushed out by the 'system,' a very heavy increase in the price of all agricultural implements and machinery, to be ultimately borne by the farmer.

"The following facts are submitted for the serious consideration both of employer and employee. Both are equally interested in this vital question, and the only hope is in united action:—

"*The American International Harvester Trust.*—The trust is here, and, making all due allowance for American bluff, unless otherwise prevented has 'come to stay.' It has already made itself felt in Australia, and some very pertinent evidence as to its methods has been placed before the Royal Commission on Customs, Excise, and Tariffs in Melbourne. In April last the question of agricultural implements and machinery was dealt with, and a few extracts from the sworn evidence may prove valuable, as they are equally applicable to this colony:—

"*Witness*: I desire to impress upon the Commission the necessity of the Federal Parliament