

56. *The Chairman.*] Would it be very much trouble? The Commission would pay a clerk's expenses?—Oh, it would not take long. But it is very difficult in our business to lay down a general rule for a typical house. Each house differs so much from the other that it does not convey much to merely quote rents and rooms.

57. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] Would it not be a good thing to keep within the scope of ten years ago and to-day for exactly the same type of house?—Yes, I see.

58. *Dr. Hight.*] Perhaps you could take a house typical of those rented by men receiving £3 per week, but then perhaps the character of the house would change and that would be more difficult to tabulate?—Yes, and we are not always in possession of the information in regard to the income. We could only guess at typical classes. However, I will prepare a table.

P. J. DE LA COUR, Boot Manufacturer and Importer, examined on oath. (No. 39.)

1. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] Do you wish to make a statement to this Commission?—No, I have been called here.

2. You are a wholesale boot-manufacturer?—Yes, I manufacture for the trade.

3. Have you any knowledge of any combination between the boot-manufacturers, or any understanding with regard to prices?—None whatever.

4. The business is perfectly open and competitive?—Yes. We have got the world to compete against.

5. Hardly that, being a protected industry?—Oh, well, it is protected in a certain sense, but not very much for the colonial manufacturer.

6. You say there is no understanding with regard to prices among the manufacturers?—None whatever.

7. *Mr. Hall.*] Do you think the cost of manufacture here is larger than similar establishments in the United States, America, or England—the cost of making a pair of boots or slippers?—Oh, very much more here.

8. Can you give us any idea as to what you estimate the difference in cost between making a pair of slippers in New Zealand and in the United States, America?—Oh, well, we can buy the English-made slipper at something like 1s. 9d., and we could not make the uppers here for anything less. You can get the slipper ready made far cheaper than we can do the uppers.

9. Is it the lower wages?—Lower wages and longer hours of labour and better machinery.

10. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] What would be the cost of these 1s. 9d. slippers in New Zealand?—They would have a leather sole, and there would be 6d. per pair and 15 per cent. duty.

11. And the cost of making them here?—You could not land them here under about 3s. 3d.

12. Then, 3s. 3d. is the New Zealand cost?—Yes.

13. The duty on slippers is 6d. per pair and 15 per cent.?—Yes, 10d. in duty and 6d. for freight, exchange, and other charges.

14. So that the duty and the original cost of manufacture would amount to 3s. 1d., and the New Zealand cost alone is 3s. 3d.: what is that owing to?—In the Old Country they would have cardboard stiffeners in soles and a part of the soling.

15. I understood it was exactly the same pair of slippers we were talking about?—Oh, no; we could not touch the cardboard here; the cost of labour to handle the cardboard would be altogether too much.

16. You are now speaking of a different article?—Oh, well, we could not manufacture that slipper at all. I thought you were speaking of the cheapest slipper we could make.

17. You mentioned the cost would be 1s. 9d. for the slippers, and I asked about the same pair of slippers in New Zealand?—They are not manufactured in New Zealand at all.

18. What would those 1s. 9d. slippers sell for in New Zealand?—Different shops have a different way of working their profits.

19. No doubt. What would be a fair price?—About 4s. or 4s. 3d.

20. That is a pair of slippers that would be 1s. 9d. in England would be retailed at 4s. 3d.?—Yes.

21. And the duty and landing charges would be 1s. 4d.?—Yes.

22. The duty is 1s. per pair on boots plus 15 per cent., plus half as much on Continental?—Yes.

23. So that it becomes very heavy on children's boots and slippers?—Yes; in fact, with anything below 5s. they are not worth the money that is paid for them.

24. *Mr. Veitch.*] What is the duty on other boots?—1s. on women's, and children's about 6d. per pair, and 1s. 6d. on men's, plus 15 per cent. on all lines.

25. *Mr. Macdonald.*] Then, the duty on lower-priced articles is not benefiting any New Zealand manufacturers at all?—No, the working-class have to pay for that particular duty, and they do not get value for their money.

26. Would you recommend the removal of duty on boots under a certain value?—Certainly—not exactly on boots, but even slippers and shoes and articles that cannot be made in New Zealand.

27. Has your manufacturing cost increased during the last ten years?—Oh, very much. I could not exactly give you an idea of how much, because I was only called about 10 o'clock this morning. We have had to get machinery to cope with the working-expenses; instead of putting on the cost we have got more up-to-date methods, and lessened the cost of production every time. Although cost of production has increased, boots are sold as cheap now as they were ten years ago.

*Dr. Hight.*] The different items in the cost of production are charged in different ways?—Yes.

29. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] Have the costs of leather advanced?—Yes.

30. And wages?—Yes.