

31. To what extent have wages advanced?—The minimum wage, say, ten years ago was £2 2s., and the minimum wage is now £2 6s. The wages for females who have served five years was 22s. 6d., and is now 30s.; and boys and girls 5s. to 6s., now 10s. to 12s. 6d.

32. What advance would that mean in the cost of production of boots—that 4s. 6d. increase in wages?—It would be about 10 per cent.

33. That is impossible—that is, for wages only?—The cost of leather has advanced more than 10 per cent.

34. What is the percentage of wages in manufacture? Take a pair of boots you would sell wholesale at 15s.: what amount of wages would be in the manufacture of that pair of boots?—About 5s.

35. That is one-third: then the wage increase would be $3\frac{1}{3}$ per cent., and not 10 per cent.? —Yes, but you go ahead on leather.

36. I am dealing with the labour of making the boots?—Very well.

37. You say that wages in the cost of manufacture are about one-third?—Yes.

38. *Dr. Hight.*] Does that apply to all kinds of boots?—Well, we can just take it as an average.

39. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] Other materials, such as grindery, &c., have they advanced?—Not very much. Nails do not vary very much; brass rivets go up and down.

40. Then it must be obvious that you cannot attribute the rise in price of boots to wages?

41. *Mr. Macdonald.*] But you say there is no rise?—No; we have kept up with the increased cost by improved machinery.

42. In ten years there would be considerable development in that respect?—Yes.

43. Has there always been a tariff on certain classes of boots?—Yes; three years ago the tariff was increased in some respects, and in others decreased. Five years ago a 10s. pair of boots (English value) would be 13s. 9d. per pair here.

44. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] What would be the duty?—25 per cent. *ad valorem* all round on boots five years ago. The present duty is 1s. 6d. and 15 per cent., so that there is an increase of duty. Take a 14s. pair of boots: they used to cost 18s. 11d., now they cost here 19s.—that is only 1d. advance; you get that boot for practically the same money. On the 16s. pair of boots, the duty would come out less.

45. Now take a pair of boots invoiced at 5s.?—We do not import anything like that 5s. boot; we just go in for the grades I have been giving you. Take a pair of lady's evening shoes costing 1s. 5d. in England. They used to land at 2s. 5d. The duty on those would be 4½d., and now 1s. 2½d. With the duty on, they are not worth the money.

46. What do you allow for retail profit?—I suppose they will want 25 per cent. anyway.

47. Is not the effect that these cheap boots are absolutely shut out?—There are some coming in still, worse luck.

48. Carrying a duty of nearly 100 per cent.?—Yes.

49. Do you import any?—No.

50. Do you make them?—We cannot touch them at all; there are none made in New Zealand. We could not touch them at 1s. 5d.

51. And the cheaper slipper carrying these high duties?—We could not touch them either; they are not made here.

52. Then there is no advantage to you in having the duty retained?—Any felt slipper or evening shoe costing anything under 2s. 6d. in the Old Country is not made here.

53. *The Chairman.*] Are they made by sweated labour in the Old Country, or is it a case of high efficiency of machinery?—I think the man and wife and as many children as they have got make a lot of these cheaper shoes.

The Chairman. That is what I call sweated labour.

[*Witness* produced felt slipper and stated that that could be manufactured by him wholesale for 2s. 9d.; he thought they could have competed on them, and imported a small consignment of material costing about £30, but he had had to pay £9 duty on it, so that shut out the line altogether. He had thought the material (red felt for lining) would come in free.]*

54. *Mr. Veitch.*] If the material came out free of duty, and the tariff remained as at present, could you get on then?—We could not touch that particular line now.

[*Witness* produced another slipper ("carpet" slipper), and said that cost 20 per cent. to line, and the outside came in free—that was, the best part of the slipper came in free, and the inferior (lining) cost 20 per cent.]

55. *Mr. Hall.*] If you got in these materials free it would assist you?—Very much.

56. *Dr. Hight.*] Are these materials manufactured in New Zealand?—No.

57. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] What is the description of material?—Red felt. There is another material known as "top-bending"—that is for the inside top bend of ladies' boots; it is of silk or coloured material; that carries a duty, but if you cut up the roll into strips under Customs supervision you get it in free. What is free is just the white linen or calico lining. We sent this red felt up to Wellington and the slipper, and they said they could not recognize it that way—that it was flannel or flannelette.

58. It could be put to some other use?—Well, I do not think so; if it were washed there would not be anything left of it.

59. Carpet felt is dutiable, and they might regard this as coming under the same classification?—Yes.

* The Secretary of the Commission rang up the Customs Department, Christchurch, and was informed that red-felt lining for slippers was free.